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Ponnuru on Palin and the Future of the Right

NATIONAL REVIEW

THE PERILS OF PAULSON

Bailouts to Nowhere

DONALD L. LUSKIN



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Death by Rescue

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This year's emergency sallies into the banking system by the Fed, the Treasury, the FDIC, and the SEC have backfired. They were intended to ameliorate a credit crisis and to keep it from spreading. Instead they've inflamed the crisis into an outright panic that now has spread around the world and triggered a recession. *By Donald L. Luskin*



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NATIONAL REVIEW (ISSN: 0028-0038) is published bi-weekly, except for the first issue in January, by NATIONAL REVIEW, Inc., at 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. ©National Review, Inc., 2008. Address all editorial mail, manuscripts, letters to the editor, etc., to Editorial Dept., NATIONAL REVIEW, 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016. Address all subscription mail orders, changes of address, undeliverable copies, etc., to NATIONAL REVIEW, Circulation Dept., P. O. Box 668, Mount Morris, Ill. 61054-0668; phone, 815-734-1232, Monday–Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 10:30 P.M. Eastern time. Adjustment requests should be accompanied by a current mailing label or facsimile. Direct classified advertising inquiries to: Classifieds Dept., NATIONAL REVIEW, 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016 or call 212-679-7330. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NATIONAL REVIEW, Circulation Dept., P. O. Box 668, Mount Morris, Ill. 61054-0668. Printed in the U.S.A.

RATES: \$59.00 a year (24 issues). Add \$21.50 for Canada and other foreign subscriptions, per year. (All payments in U.S. currency.) The editors cannot be responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or artwork unless return postage or, better, a stamped self-addressed envelope is enclosed. Opinions expressed in signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the editors.

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November 17 issue; printed October 30

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WORLD WIDE WEB www.nationalreview.com

MAIN NUMBER 212-679-7330

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES 815-734-1232

WASHINGTON OFFICE 202-543-9226

ADVERTISING SALES 212-679-7330

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letters to the editor

WHEN WFB WASN'T RIGHT

I found the excerpt from William F. Buckley's book, in which he recounted his disagreement with Ronald Reagan over the Panama Canal (Buckley wanted to turn the Canal over to Panama; Reagan didn't), most interesting ("United in the Faith, Differing on a Particular," October 20). However, Buckley's position was wrong then, and it is wrong now.

I spent about two months in the former Canal Zone, and transited the Canal several times in 1980 on private yachts. That was about the time the U.S. and Panama began to run the Canal jointly through a commission (Panama took total control in 1999). In 1983, I spent another four months there and transited the Canal several more times.

In 1980, the transits were very efficient. The facilities, despite their age, were well-maintained. Waiting times for large ships to begin a transit were usually no more than twelve hours. All the personnel and pilots I met were very knowledgeable and courteous. From the user's standpoint, the Canal was an extremely well-run operation. As I understand it, the Canal was one of the few profitable operations of the federal government.

Just three years later the changes were significant. The transcontinental railroad, used to ferry people and supplies the full length of the Canal, was no longer operating. The roadbed had deteriorated to the point that it was unsafe to move trains. Waiting times for large ships could be as long as 48 hours. Accident rates were higher because of careless operations. Many maintenance and operational duties were now being provided by Chinese contractors.

Prior to 1980, we may not have been loved by countries in the region, but we were respected. In 1983, we still weren't loved, and we weren't respected. We still have military bases there to provide security for the Canal, but when

the "lease" for these bases expires, we'll be asked to leave, just as we were in the Philippines.

*Patrick C. Curci
San Diego, Calif.*

WE'LL TAKE OPTION F

Kudos to you for putting Byron York's "Sarah Palin, Governor" (October 20) on the web, and pointing out that CNN attributed to York the attitude toward Palin he had accused the press of harboring. I have to say, looking at most of the media today, it is sometimes hard to decide whether they are "incompetent, stupid, unqualified, corrupt, backward, or—or, well, all of the above."

*Russell S. Gonnering
Via e-mail*



AGAINST KRUGMANIA

In "The Week" (November 3), you congratulate Paul Krugman on his Nobel Prize, and state that while his *New York Times* column is "loopy," his academic work on trade has been "groundbreaking."

The problem with this reasoning is that there is significant overlap between his column and the field of economics—on balance, he actually sets his area of study back. Krugman's numerous documented economic misrepresentations, of which you only hint, would cause the reasonable observer to doubt Krugman's wisdom. He has a warped view of free enterprise, and I recall a column a couple of years ago in which he vehemently blamed the Bush administration for lack of wage growth while refusing to acknowledge any impact of (illegal) immigration.

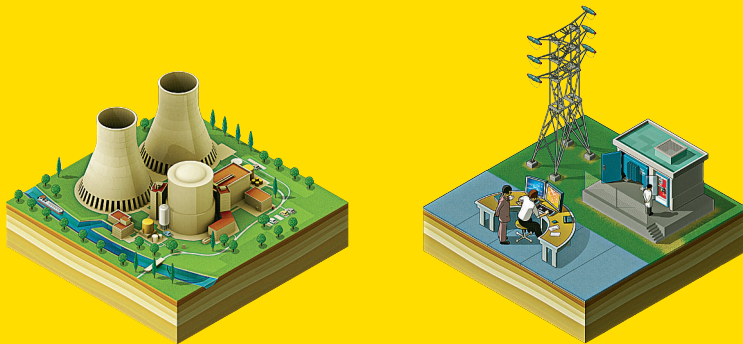
Unfortunately, this dilutes the Nobel's prestige, even for the many recipients who were recognized for actual accomplishments.

*Houston E. Ball
Knoxville, Tenn.*

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What we generate: energy innovations. What we value: clean energy at home.

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THE WEEK

■ Not Scott McClellan!

■ Obamacon is the flavor of the month: Republicans who back Barack. Colin Powell, Ken Adelman, and Charles Fried (the last two director of arms control and solicitor general under Ronald Reagan, respectively) are the best known. A few themes bind them together. 1) *A man you can distrust*. “I sure hope Obama is more open, centrist [and] sensible . . . than his liberal record indicates,” said Adelman. Typically, partisans worry that their man will not honor his promises. Obamacons *hope* theirs won’t. Not the best foundation for a relationship, or a presidency. 2) *Palin hatred*. We have criticized Palin’s shortcomings, and suggested how she might rectify them. But Obamacons wage class war against the dumb broad. Adelman declared that he “would not have hired her for even a mid-level post in the arms-control agency.” But who looks for veeps there? Who would put Ken Adelman on a ticket? Yobs, keep your places. 3) *Supporting abortion*. Nearly all of the Obamacons are pro-choice, which surely makes it easier for them to go over. 4) *Following the leader*. None of these Republicans endorsed Obama until after he had built up a solid lead in the polls. They praise him for a coolness, and attack McCain for an unsteadiness, that are themselves in large part a reflection of their positions in the race. In the event of an Obama victory, we stand ready to publish their regrets next year.

■ One old saw that has been taken out of the toolbox a lot during this election cycle is the remark of Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. that Franklin D. Roosevelt had a “first-class temperament.” (Holmes also noted that he had a “second-rate intellect,” and may actually have been speaking of Teddy—but never mind.) The payoff here is that Barack Obama has a first-rate temperament, especially in contrast to feisty, impulsive John McCain. Once again, Obama benefits from his ability to be a projective screen for his admirers’ hopes. Onstage and on the stump he has been cool and collected. But if the world becomes a tad more difficult, or the media a shade less fawning, would these same traits seem detached? Haughty? Out of it? Without detracting from Obama’s abilities, one may note his potential liabilities—and note as well that, however exposed a grueling two-year campaign is, it is nothing like the four-year maelstrom of the Oval Office.

■ That \$700 billion rescue package for the banks is in danger of turning from a safety net into a slush fund. Congress approved the money to be used as part of a specific plan to buy distressed assets from troubled banks. Now that plan has morphed, and morphed again. First, Treasury secretary Henry Paulson decided that the asset-purchase plan wouldn’t work fast enough; he used the money to buy stock in the banks and

See page 8.



recapitalize them. Paulson structured the deal so that the government’s ownership share would not come with voting rights, but he is out of a job in less than three months. Barack Obama, backed by Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress, could quickly rewrite the rules. In addition, the plan appears to be expanding beyond banks. Paulson is considering aid to insurance companies, and beleaguered automakers GM and Chrysler have come to Washington with their hats in hand. These car companies’ troubles have been obvious to everyone for some time, and their collapse would not imperil the financial system. If you need a place to draw a line in the sand, there you go.

■ It’s no sin to misunderstand the circumloquacious Alan Greenspan, but reporters should not leap to the conclusion that the former Fed chairman has repudiated free markets. Greenspan said he had discovered “a flaw” in his thinking: He had overestimated the market’s capacity to correct itself. But he also said this: “Whatever regulatory changes are made, they will pale in comparison to the change already evident in today’s markets. Those markets for an indefinite future will be

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far more restrained than would any currently contemplated new regulatory regime.” Greenspan vs. markets may be an irresistible story, but it should still be resisted.

■ Its leftward bias is a familiar irritant, but the establishment press has plumbed new depths as a campaign surrogate air-brushing Barack Obama’s radical past. The *Los Angeles Times* refuses to release the videotape of a 2003 fete at which Obama and unrepentant terrorists Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn reportedly gathered with various PLO apologists to honor Rashid Khalidi—the former Yasser Arafat mouthpiece who has justified terror attacks against the Israeli government. The media, moreover, bury Obama’s mid-Nineties ties to the Chicago New Party. The New Party was the extreme leftist electoral arm of ACORN and enjoyed close ties to the Democratic Socialists of America (the U.S. division of the Socialist International). And the press has been spinning overtime to explain away Obama’s critique of the Warren Court during a 2001 radio interview, in which he plumbed for “redistribution

of wealth” and “economic justice” while allowing that perhaps the courts were not the best institution to pursue these goals. Rather than suggest that Obama is out of the mainstream, the press is redefining the mainstream.

■ One of the most revealing moments of the last few weeks of the campaign was Obama’s encounter with Joe Wurzelbacher, the Ohio man who would become world-famous as “Joe the Plumber.” Approached by Obama at a campaign appearance in Ohio, Wurzelbacher told the Democratic candidate of his desire to buy the plumbing company where he works and wondered whether Obama’s tax-raising plan would penalize success. “I think when you spread the wealth around, it’s good for everybody,” Obama told Wurzelbacher. When McCain brought up the encounter at the candidates’ final debate, Joe the Plumber became a hot campaign issue. The press might have responded by delving deeper into the critical issue of taxes, but chose instead to attack Joe the Plumber. No sooner had McCain mentioned him at the debate than Wurzelbacher found himself

Re: Distribution

SENATOR OBAMA says, “For decades, America has been victim to an anti-tax sentiment that has led to tax cuts that favor wealth, not work.” The implication seems to be that the U.S. has pursued a tax policy that is radically different from that of other countries because it favors the wealthy.

Does the U.S. favor the rich in comparison to other countries? The nearby chart addresses this question. It plots for the years 1981 through 2007 the ratio of the tax rate faced by the rich to the tax rate faced by a typical blue-collar worker. If a country’s tax code is highly progressive, then this ratio will be quite high, as the rich will have tax rates that are much higher than those faced by the poor. In a flat-tax economy, the ratio would be 1.0, since everyone would face the same tax rate.

In the United States, we have a top statutory income-tax rate of 35 percent. The Social Security tax does not raise this rate, as it goes to zero for incomes above \$102,000, but the Medicare tax of 1.45 percent on employers and employees does raise it, making the top rate on labor income in the U.S. about 38 percent. In 2007, a person who earned half of the average income (as measured in GDP per capita) earned about \$23,000 and faced a federal income-tax rate of 15 percent. This person also, however, faced Social Security taxes and Medicare taxes. Accounting for these, the income received by the lower-wage worker faced a combined tax rate of about 30 percent, and the ratio of the top rate to this one was about 1.3.

When one performs such a calculation for a typical European country, one finds a lot more flatness in the tax code. This occurs for a simple reason: While income taxes tend to be quite progressive, payroll and sales (or value-added) taxes are paid by just about everyone, and large governments around the world have to rely on all of these tools

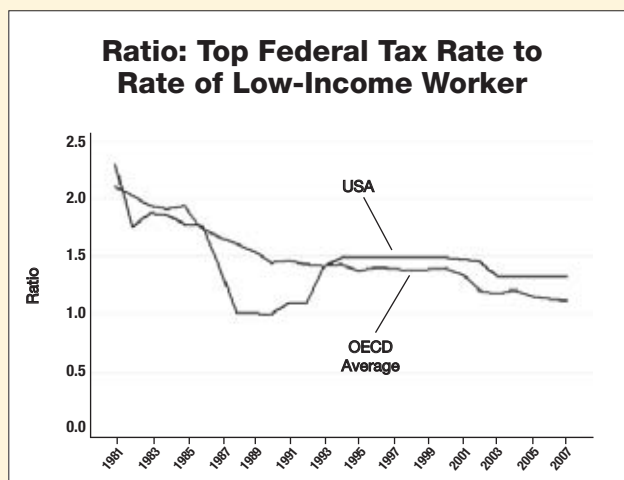
to raise the revenue they need to spend more than 40 percent of GDP.

Thus, the chart reveals a surprising fact: We redistribute far more than does the typical developed country.

The chart also shows that this was not always true. The U.S. redistributed more than its major trading partners when Ronald Reagan took office and the top marginal tax rate was 70 percent. Reagan then drastically reduced that top rate, but the progress was reversed first by George H. W. Bush and then by Bill Clinton. Ever since the early 1990s, we have been one of the more redistributive countries in the OECD.

The notion that U.S. tax policy is out of whack with the practices of our main trading partners is absolutely correct, but Obama has the direction wrong. We redistribute more than they do, even with rates where they are.

—KEVIN A. HASSETT



SOURCES: AEI INTERNATIONAL TAX DATABASE (WHICH USES DATA PRIMARILY FROM PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS, ERNST & YOUNG, AND THE OECD); IMF WORLD ECONOMIC OUTLOOK DATABASE. NOTE: THE TAX RATE IS THE SUM OF LABOR, PAYROLL, AND VALUE-ADDED TAXES; FOR LOWER-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, INCOME IS CALCULATED AS HALF OF GDP PER CAPITA.

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—Paul E. Peterson and Daniel Nadler

Homeschooling Goes Mainstream

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—Milton Gaither

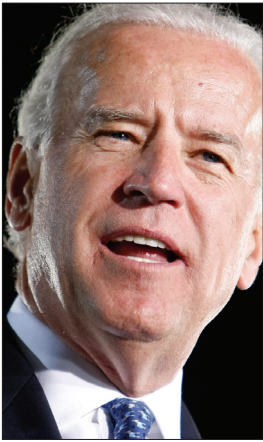
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THE WEEK...

under assault from the *New York Times*, television networks, radio, and magazines. They reported that Wurzelbacher didn't have a plumber's license, that he wasn't a member of the local plumber's union, that he owed some back taxes in Ohio, and that he simply failed to understand how wonderful Barack Obama's tax proposal would be for him. We think there's a lesson in all this: Ask Obama an inconvenient question, and you just might find yourself under investigation.



■ The edge the press's support gives Obama is dulled somewhat by his chosen running mate. Joe Biden, for whom unexpressed thought is an alien concept, is McCain's gift that keeps on giving. Back when he was running for president himself, Biden aptly noted Obama's dearth of experience and warned that the Oval Office did not lend itself to on-the-job training. More recently, as a vice-presidential contender fresh from a national-security briefing, Biden could not help but

return to that theme, predicting it would "not be six months before the world tests Barack Obama like they did John Kennedy." Worse, when this inevitable "international crisis" hits, Biden plaintively told a group of supporters, "we're gonna need you to use your influence . . . within the community, to stand with him. Because it's not gonna be apparent initially . . . that we're right." Reading Biden's mind is risky business. Presumably, though, he foresees a President Obama responding meekly to one of the many rogue spoilsports that remain unmoved by the siren song of "change"—with a resulting tide of public unrest that requires the Left to stand by its man. In other words, Biden states the rationale for voting McCain. And, for once, he's right.

■ In an interview with a Massachusetts newspaper, Democratic congressman Barney Frank called for a 25 percent cut in defense spending. How he arrived at this figure isn't known. Did he scrutinize the Pentagon's budget? Did he evaluate foreign threats? Apparently not, because his argument amounted to this: "We don't need all these fancy new weapons." He also said that higher taxes soon will be necessary. It was a nifty summation of modern liberal logic: When at war in two countries, slash the military's resources; when confronting a bad economy, seize more of society's earnings and savings.

■ In the final stages of the race, there were reports that the Republican National Committee had bought some clothes for Sarah Palin. It seems the Alaska governor's wardrobe was heavy on parkas and fleece but wasn't quite up to a national 24/7 campaign. So aides went out and bought outfits for Palin and some members of her family. The expenditures

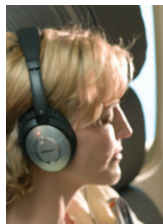
included about \$75,000 at Nieman Marcus and \$50,000 at Saks Fifth Avenue. Palin explained that a significant part of the clothing was returned unworn—it had been purchased for the busy candidate to pick some outfits from—and that the rest of it would be given to charity at the end of the campaign. Nevertheless, Democrats and the media pounced—what hypocrisy from the Alaskan hockey mom!—and the McCain campaign found itself on the defensive. Yes, the RNC could have spent less, but from a political standpoint the campaign's big mistake was not to hide the expenses. When campaigns buy items like clothing, they usually conceal the expenses under the category of "consulting" when it's time to file federal campaign-expense reports. The McCain campaign didn't take part in the charade, and got whacked for it.

■ "Some conservatives have been pretty hard on you," CNN reporter Drew Griffin said to Sarah Palin during a recent interview. "The NATIONAL REVIEW had a story saying that 'you know, I can't tell if Sarah Palin is incompetent, stupid, unqualified, corrupt or all of the above.'" The first thing we should say is that NATIONAL REVIEW never said any such thing. A story by Byron York ("Sarah Palin, Governor," October 20)—which was a positive assessment of Palin's performance in office—began: "Watching press coverage of the Republican candidate for vice president, it's sometimes hard to decide whether Sarah Palin is incompetent, stupid, unqualified, corrupt, backward, or—or, well, all of the above." In other words—listen up, CNN—York was saying not that Palin was any of those things, but that the media coverage of her has been dreadfully biased. After a day of silence, CNN apologized to us. It mangled the story. It also illustrated York's point.

■ A week before Election Day, more than a million people in Georgia alone already had cast their ballots. Over half the states currently permit some version of this activity, commonly called "early voting" but perhaps better described as "premature voting." It is expected to smash records this year. That's a shame, because voting is a civic act. It does not need to be difficult, but it certainly should be serious, and, insofar as time-zone variations permit, simultaneous. Special allowances must be made for members of the military, particularly those who are deployed, as well as for others who truly can't participate in this ritual of democracy for reasons of work or health. Yet these cases ought to represent the rare exceptions rather than a growing bloc of convenience-seekers. Those who vote too soon cheapen the deed. They miss a chance to assess late developments, such as the financial crisis or debate performances. They may even forfeit their votes entirely: During the presidential primaries, many early voters backed candidates who dropped out before Election Day. Presidential campaigns have become the political equivalent of marathons, and a lot of voters understandably want to be done with them. Local races, however, are often sprints that last just a few weeks in October. They suffer from inattention as it is, and premature voting compounds the problem. These are important choices for individuals, and decisive ones for society. When they lose their aura, so does citizenship itself.

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THE WEEK...

■ Republican senator Ted Stevens of Alaska has been convicted of seven felony charges related to false statements he made about accepting gifts from an oil company. He is appealing and insists he is innocent, but he has been convicted by a jury of his peers, and at the very least he exercised colossally poor judgment. The home renovation at the heart of the trial was especially curious: The contractors were told to send the invoices first to an oil-field-services company, which then sent the bills to Stevens, who paid them out of a separate account set up for the project. Stevens is locked in a close race for reelection, and his guilty verdict may well hand a victory to his Democratic challenger—not good, given that Republicans aren’t sure they’ll have enough senators left to filibuster. But the Republican party has only itself to blame. Republicans had ample opportunity to pressure Stevens to step aside, a course of action we advocated three months ago, to provide sufficient time for an untarnished Republican nominee to emerge from the state’s August 26 primary. If Stevens does somehow win reelection, resigning will still be a good idea.



■ As we go to press, it appears a distinct possibility that Pennsylvania’s Jack Murtha will lose his House seat. Why? Probably because he called his western-Pennsylvania constituents racists, then clarified that he just meant “there’s still folks that have a problem voting for someone because they are black” and “this whole area, years ago, was really redneck.” It was the second

time—in this election alone—that the region faced public contempt from the Left: Western Pennsylvania was the target of Obama’s “clinging to guns and religion” remarks. It goes without saying that these were idiotic moves politically, but more important is what they reveal about many politicians in the Democratic party: They look down on their constituents, especially voters in rural areas. In a democracy, though, constituents are supposed to get the last laugh. On November 4, we hope they’ll be in the mood for a chuckle.

■ Schadenfreude is the pleasure we take in the pain of other people. What do we call the pleasure we take in the frustration of other people’s schadenfreude? Scarcely had the world financial system begun to reel and sway than opportunists looked to blame America and capitalism. “The time of domination by one economy and one currency has been consigned to the past once and for all,” said Russian president Dmitri Medvedev. “Self-regulation to solve all problems, it’s finished,” said French president Nicolas Sarkozy, evoking a favorite French demon, the free-wheeling Anglo-Saxon. “Laissez-faire, it’s finished. The all-powerful market that is always right, it’s finished.” Well, both gentlemen may be right, to a degree (though it’s hard to parse the accuracy of an

attack on a straw man, such as Sarkozy’s). But when the world panics, where does it put its money? In the dollar and the yen, it seems, which have been rising against all other currencies, even the mighty euro (forget the ruble). The American economy has sailed through worse storms, and will sail through this.

■ Bashar al-Assad, the president of Syria, calculates rather simply that the more he makes a nuisance of himself, the higher the price the United States will pay one day to buy him off. So he lines up with Iran, uses murder as a political tool, sponsors a dozen terrorist groups, and sends Qaeda volunteers into Iraq. For unfathomable reasons, the administration has believed that if he is humored, he will switch to policies of sweetness and light. The fruitless years of this illusion have just ended. United States special forces in Iraq have mounted a cross-border raid into Syria, successfully attacking a village that served as a base for Qaeda volunteers and suicide bombers on their way into Iraq. Military sources estimate that nine in ten foreign fighters in Iraq have entered via this route, with Syrian connivance, naturally. Syria calls this raid a “terrorist aggression” and a “war crime,” while itself financing and arming real terrorist aggression against Iraq, Israel, and Lebanon. Not long ago, the Israelis mounted a rather similar operation to take out what seems to have been the start of a nuclear-weapons program. The United States has also drawn the line. As a military official in Washington explained, “We are taking matters into our own hands.” Something for Bashar usefully to ponder at last.

■ Sooner or later, life always imitates *Saturday Night Live*. In the mid-1970s, when Sarah Palin was a pre-teen point guard and Tina Fey was cracking up her nursery-school classmates, a staple of *SNL*’s newscasts was a mock-solemn bulletin declaring that Generalissimo Francisco Franco was still dead. This news does not seem to have reached Judge Baltasar Garzyn, an activist member of Spain’s highest criminal court. In the last decade he has attempted to file criminal charges against Augusto Pinochet, Henry Kissinger, and Silvio Berlusconi, and now he has taken his crusade into the great beyond by seeking indictments against the late Franco and 34 members of his regime, all of them equally deceased, for crimes against humanity committed between 1936 and 1951. While Spain’s turbulent history should certainly be investigated, putting the dead on trial seems a grotesque way of going about it, especially since a 1977 amnesty law closed the books on prosecutions of Franco and his associates, even those who were still alive. But that won’t stop Garzyn, who, like every overreaching judge, thinks the cause he advocates is far too important to be subjected to pesky laws and the will of the people.

■ Lt. Col. Malalai Kakar was one of the most prominent women in Afghanistan. Pause for a moment to consider that sentence: A woman lieutenant colonel? In a land where, seven short years ago, women were allowed no role in public life? And this one was famous for hers? Yes—such is the change we are helping courageous Afghans work in their society. Kakar joined Afghanistan’s police force in 1982. When the Taliban came to power, she fled to Pakistan, but



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THE WEEK...

resumed her career after the United States toppled that hateful regime, eventually becoming head of the Kandahar police department charged with investigating and preventing crimes against women. She seems to have been nothing short of extraordinary: On one occasion she killed three would-be assassins in a shootout, and on another she burst into a home, knocked down its owner, and rescued the woman and child he was keeping in a cage; she was also a mother of six. The resurgent Taliban has now murdered her. "She was our target, and we successfully eliminated our target," its spokesman said. Remember those words; remember the life whose end they document; remember that there really are good guys and bad guys in the world; and remember which are we.



■ In our last issue, we editorialized about Hu Jia, and his failure to win the Nobel Peace Prize—or rather, the decision of the jurors not to give it to him. (They gave it to Martti Ahtisaari, a former Finnish president and U.N. type.) Hu is a democracy activist, imprisoned by the Chinese government before the Olympics. He had been posting articles and giving interviews

criticizing the government's Olympic plans, and advocating freedom in general. That could not be tolerated. In recent days, he and his cause were honored by the European Parliament, which gave Hu its Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. The man for whom the prize is named would be pleased, and so are all well-wishers of human rights, and foes of tyranny.

■ India's first moon rocket, *Chandrayaan-1*, is expected to reach lunar orbit in mid-November and spend the next two years analyzing and mapping the moon's surface from an altitude of 62 miles. An unmanned lunar landing is planned for 2011, and a manned orbital flight for 2015. With hundreds of millions of Indians still living in wretched poverty, such a project may at first seem wasteful: How many people will it feed? Yet the space program has boosted India's already high reputation for technological prowess, which, along with the recent shedding of numerous protectionist economic restrictions, has brought a measure of prosperity to many who used to be poor. India has even found a role providing modest amounts of food aid to less fortunate nearby countries—Afghanistan, Nepal, and now war-torn Sri Lanka as well. India still has a long way to go, both in providing for its own citizens and in deregulating its economy. Still, the moon shot and the foreign aid both show what a nation can accomplish when it is innovative and eager to assume its place in a global economy.

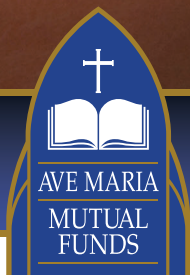
■ A strange little bit of historical revisionism emerged from a conference of French historians gathered at Agincourt, site of the battle fought between England and France in 1415,

which Shakespeare made the centerpiece of his play *Henry V*. The band of academic *frures* made known their conclusions that the English were nothing like as outnumbered on the battlefield as has been claimed (five to one, said Shakespeare), and further that the English behaved like "war criminals." Declared historian Christophe Gilliot: "There were numerous heroic acts by the French on the field of battle, but they were met with barbarism by the English." What next—a demand for reparations? News of these scholarly deliberations was greeted with scorn in England, with many calls for the French to examine their own conduct in battles where *they* were victorious . . . if they can think of any.

■ A couple in Italy wished to name their new child Venerdi, which means "Friday." They have, however, been thwarted by Italy's Court of Appeal, which ordered the child's name to be registered as Gregorio, after the saint's day on which he was born. The interesting thing here was the court's reason for refusing the parents' chosen name. Friday, they ruled, was a name associated with "subjection and inferiority," because of Man Friday, the dark-skinned servant in *Robinson Crusoe*. Gregorio's parents are disgruntled, and have defiantly declared their intention to name their next child Mercoledì (Wednesday). Our dismay at learning that Italy has succumbed to the sillier kind of political correctness is somewhat tempered by the good news that, *primo*, classic adventure literature is still read somewhere, and *secondo*, Italy, with one of the world's lowest fertility rates, still has some citizens willing to raise more than one child.

■ Jacob Weisberg of *Slate* declares that the financial crisis means "the end of libertarianism," by which he really means the end of free-market economics. We write "declares" because he makes no argument, only the Olympian pronouncement that any analysis of the recent market turmoil "has to put the libertarian theory of self-regulating financial markets at the scene of the crime." Weisberg's explication is shoddy, leading economist Tyler Cowen to wonder, "Am I allowed to say that the experience of Iceland refutes the small nation, social democratic model?" We might as easily argue that Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe discredits land taxes. Most sensible partisans of free markets understand that the choice before us is not between Soviet-style central planning and anarcho-capitalism, but between regulation that is intelligent, restrained, and flexible and regulation that is suffocating, over-ambitious, and rigid. We suspect that as the crisis becomes better understood, the "scene of the crime" to which Weisberg alludes will look less like the board game Clue—Fannie Mae, in the boardroom, with a mortgage-backed security—than like *Murder on the Orient Express*—a lot of bad actors, including self-serving politicians, short-sighted financial institutions, defective regulators, and irresponsible borrowers, each with his own motive, and no satisfactory resolution.

■ Reading Christopher Hitchens over the last few years, it has been hard to avoid the thought that his fierceness against the Islamists is grounded in his militant atheism: in the perception that what is wrong with them is that they represent religion in



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THE WEEK...

its purest form; that Christians would be just as dangerous if they took their faith as seriously. Hitchens provided evidence for this theory by endorsing Obama, largely, it seems, because Palin has said kind words about creationism. No one has written more passionately about the moral imperative of standing in solidarity with Iraqis resisting despotism. We now know the unwritten qualifier: unless it means also standing in solidarity with conservative evangelicals.

■ Fox News did an ambush interview of Bill Ayers, or attempted one. The encounter took place outside Ayers's home. And he was wearing—why not?—a huge red star on his shirt. He said to the interviewer, "This is my property," and he called the police. Ayers, of course, has always stood against private property, and he is not only anti-police—he has bombed their stations. Victor Davis Hanson, political commentator and classicist, was reminded of Thucydides, who warned that, in VDH's words, "those who destroy the protocols of civilization may well one day wish to rely on them."

■ It's nice when reporters are candid, and Michael Hastings was very candid in a piece for *GQ* magazine. He had been assigned by *Newsweek* to cover Rudolph Giuliani in the Republican primaries. And he didn't like the candidate very much. "I quickly realized Rudy was a maniac. I had a recurring fantasy in which I took him out during a press conference (it was nonlethal, just something that put him out of commission for a year or so), saving America from the horror of a President Giuliani. . . . [Campaign] reporters aren't just covering a story, they're a part of it—influencing outcomes, setting expectations, framing candidates—and despite what they tell themselves, it's impossible to both be a part of the action and report on it objectively." We don't think it's impossible, actually: We think people who aren't very professional don't try hard enough. Still, it's nice to hear candor from reporters, and Hastings has rendered something like a service.



■ The *New York Times* has added the rock star Bono to its op-ed stable, meaning that the same newspaper that finds the governor of Alaska grossly unqualified to be vice president of the United States believes a pop singer is obviously qualified to be lecturing the world about African civil wars and development economics. *Times* op-ed-page editor Andrew Rosenthal said he'd like to hire more song-and-dance men, but conservatives need not apply: "The problem with conservative columnists," Rosenthal said, "is that many of them lie in print." You'd think a newspaper that spent years publishing the fictitious reports of Jayson Blair—and that won a Pulitzer for the lies Walter

Duranty told on behalf of Stalin—would be a little more circumspect about that. But who are we to question Bono's credentials? He wears snazzy glasses and can see Ireland from his house.

■ Charles O'Byrne, chief of staff to New York governor David Patterson, did not file any income-tax returns for the years 2001–2005. Why not? His attorney explained to reporters that Mr. O'Byrne suffers from an ailment called "non-filer syndrome." Victims of this distressing malady are, the attorney further explained, "very high-functioning people who otherwise can complete all of the ordinary tasks in their lives . . . but there is something that they can't do, and many times that causes them not to be able to file their tax returns." Mr. O'Byrne seems now to have cleared his \$300,000 tax obligation; but with the state facing a \$12 billion budget shortfall next year, he was obliged to resign anyway. We extend him our sympathies in his affliction, but would like him to know that the federal authorities have come up with a cure for "non-filer syndrome." It is called "put-you-in-jail-and-seize-your-assets therapy," and is said to have proven very efficacious in clinical trials.

■ As a detector of bovine byproduct, Michelle Malkin is unparalleled. When a Republican activist faked a robbery and assault on herself in a preposterous attempt to discredit supporters of Barack Obama, Malkin was among the first to question her story. She has experience behind her: Having covered dozens of hate-crime hoaxes originating on the left—fake noose-hangings, phony anti-Muslim crimes, various frauds perpetrated on college campuses—Malkin had eyes to see through the shenanigan, and did not let herself be blinded by politics. Nice catch, Michelle.

2008

The Choice

THIS election does not present Americans with a straight-up choice between conservatism and liberalism. This is not so much because John McCain is a moderate, although he is, as because liberals are likely to have effective majorities in both houses of Congress. Thus the choice we face is, in most respects, between a liberalism that is checked and one that is not.

We have reached this point because of the unpopularity of President Bush, the parlous state of the economy, and the enduring weakness of Republican positions on domestic policy. Senator McCain has done little to overcome these obstacles to his presidential hopes, and as a result he trails in the polls.

His opponent, Barack Obama, is a talented young politician who has shown both discipline and savvy in beating Hillary Clinton for the Democratic presidential nomination. Given the initial odds against him, it is not quite right to say that he is untested. Yet his accomplishments, beyond propelling himself to the top of American politics, are few.

His views place him on the left edge of liberalism. The



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press has ruled that discussion of his extensive association with radicals is outside the bounds of polite society, although his history surely demonstrates at the very least that he has followed a policy of having no enemies to the left—and indicates that he probably shared more of their views than he now lets on.

The platform on which Obama is running is troubling enough. He advocates higher tax rates than any Democratic presidential candidate of the past 20 years has called for. He favors a health-care plan that would move millions of Americans from the private plans they prefer to a government system—and, in the long run, would reduce the quality and raise the cost of health care. He is more hostile to trade liberalization than any presidential nominee of either party within the last 70 years. He supports taxpayer funding of abortion. He seeks judges who “empathize” with liberal causes rather than feel themselves bound by the text of the Constitution. And with a stronger liberal base in Congress than any Democratic president has had in at least 40 years, he would have a good chance to get much of this domestic agenda accomplished.

His chief foreign-policy commitments have been to meet with America’s enemies—one could be forgiven for wondering whether he even thinks in terms of America’s having enemies—and to abandon Iraq. If he had prevailed on Iraq over

the last three years, we would have lost a war that we now appear to be winning.

Luckily for the United States and Iraq, Senator McCain prevailed instead. He advocated the troop increase and strategic shift now known as the surge, first when other Republicans were denying the need for any change and then when they were rushing to quit the war. When President Bush came around on the need for the surge, McCain overlooked their past differences and became the policy’s most effective advocate. If we win in Iraq, McCain will deserve a good deal of the credit.

McCain has a solid record of opposing economically damaging tax increases. He has always opposed abortion. He has advanced a creative free-market health-

care policy, even if he has not done much to defend it against Obama’s dishonest attacks. He is a scourge of wasteful spending and a resolute free trader. He says that he will look for judges who have demonstrated their fidelity to the Constitution as written. We have our differences with McCain, as do most conservatives, on such issues as immigration and stem cells. On each of these issues, however, Obama is at least as mistaken.

We have no doubt that if McCain is president we will find much to criticize. But we will be confident that we have the right commander-in-chief and that liberals do not have a free hand to remake our country. In this election we support Senator McCain and urge all conservatives to do so as well.

THE ECONOMY

Less than Stimulating

Now that the government has spent billions bailing out Wall Street, political calculus—at least Nancy Pelosi’s—demands that equal attention be paid to “Main Street.” Thus Democrats in Congress have announced that they are putting together a \$300 billion economic-stimulus package. (For more details, see Stephen Spruiell’s article on page 22.) Not all of the proposed measures are objectionable, but none of them would be effective in staving off a recession. Considering what we are likely to get out of this Congress, it is probably better to do nothing at all.

Last winter, Congress passed and Bush signed a \$168 billion economic-stimulus package, consisting mostly of tax rebates. Upon signing the bill, President Bush called the package “a booster shot for our economy.” As of this writing, the patient appears utterly unresponsive. The rebate checks failed to have much of an impact, because the concept underlying all such stimulus is flawed: The economy is stimulated when tax policy encourages people to work, save, and invest; rebate checks merely redistribute income.

But House Speaker Pelosi now says she wants another nine-figure stimulus package. In addition to rebate checks, it would include funds for bridges and highways, extended unemployment benefits, and a bailout for states whose budgets are in the red. Bush has signaled his willingness to sign a stimulus bill, and at this point he and Pelosi are merely haggling over the size. If Obama wins, size won’t matter. Pelosi could split the package in two, send Bush whatever he’s willing to sign, and let Obama sign the rest.

This would be a colossal waste of money at a time when we have little to spare. New infrastructure spending might create some jobs, but taking money out of the private economy would delay private-sector job creation and could exacerbate job losses. Moreover, our roads and bridges aren’t deteriorating for lack of funding. They are in bad shape because members of Congress would rather build monuments to themselves (see “Don Young’s Way” in Alaska) than set national transportation priorities. And bailing out states that indulged in politically popular but unaffordable spending would only encourage them to do it again.

A stimulus package along the lines of what the Democrats have proposed would not heal what ails the economy, which has been wracked by a historic credit contraction. But there are signs that the crisis is subsiding. New-home sales were up in September, and economic indicators point to a slow but steady easing in the credit market. We’re not in the clear yet, but we’re far from the point at which the economy requires yet another heavy-handed intervention.

The U.S. government just posted a record-breaking \$455 billion deficit for fiscal year 2008, and 2009 isn’t looking any better. With the government taking on so many new liabilities, Congress should learn how to prioritize. The political calculus may call for spending \$300 billion on ineffective stimulus, but the real math just doesn’t add up.

Obama’s chief foreign-policy commitments have been to meet with America’s enemies—one could be forgiven for wondering whether he even thinks in terms of America’s having enemies—and to abandon Iraq.

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■ WALL STREET CRISIS ■

Endless Intervention?

Giving banks money was distasteful but necessary; telling them how to spend it is tempting but wrong.

ANDREW STUTTAFORD

It's a measure of the predicament in which we find ourselves that merely keeping the banking system going now seems like something of a triumph. It's even more of a measure that, despite the spending of once-unimaginable amounts of money (or the agreement to spend them), the outcome is still uncertain. Nevertheless, there have been a few tentative signs that the system may be on the mend. LIBOR (the London Interbank Offered Rate, a key indicator of the interest rates at which banks lend to each other) has been edging down. The TED spread (the difference between three-month LIBOR and the yield on notionally risk-free three-month Treasury bills—a good basis for weighing nervousness in the interbank market) has narrowed. It appears that lending between banks is beginning to revive. It's a start. Fingers crossed.

None of this is to suggest that a severe recession can be avoided. It cannot. The United States looks set to join many other nations in what may well be the most bru-

tal economic downturn since the 1970s. Saving the banking system, however, will help keep the specter of Joad at bay (a depression, or anything approaching a depression, remains unlikely) and is, obviously, an essential precondition of an eventual recovery, a recovery that would be impossible if the credit markets were allowed to fail. That's something that market fundamentalists fretting about the "nationalization" of America's banks need to remember. Risking the ruin of this country's financial system would have been an absurdly dangerous way to make an ideological point. Yes, part of the genius of capitalism is the "creative destruction" so famously described by Joseph Schumpeter, but sometimes destruction is just destruction.

Watching a Republican Treasury secretary orchestrate the government's acquisition of significant shareholdings in America's leading banks has been a disconcerting experience for many of us on the right. Secretary Paulson himself correctly described the whole notion of the government's taking a stake in private companies as "objectionable." No less cor-

rectly, if a touch belatedly, he recognized that he was left with little alternative. As originally formulated, his TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) was too complex and, in a sense, too indirect to provide the reassurance and support that were needed. Confidence in the banks was collapsing, and without confidence there are no banks, and without banks, well, you get the picture. Only a straightforward injection of new money—and with it, more crucially still, the suggestion that the banks were now effectively underwritten by Uncle Sam, the biggest ATM of them all—would have any chance of halting the slide.

The need to restore confidence lay, I suspect, at the heart of Paulson's controversial decision not only to offer America's nine largest banks an infusion totaling \$125 billion in taxpayer cash, but also to "force" them to accept it. It's certainly consistent with the usually reported justification for the Treasury's bullying: Apparently, the feds didn't want participation in the program (at least by a major bank) to be seen as a potentially lethal admission of weakness. Maybe, but that argument discounts the comfort that ought to come from government support, and it's not entirely convincing. It's more likely the Treasury took the view that in a credit market where pricing had broken down, no bank, however impressive its supposed strength, could be said to be completely safe. In the event of the potential fire sale that, in the days before the announcement of the Paulson purchase, lurked in the future of almost every bank, what would assets really be worth? To ask that question is to answer it. Under the circumstances, preemptively reinforcing the most important players was the right thing to do.

Injecting new capital into the banks is, of course, meant to do more than shore up confidence. By filling some of the craters left in their balance sheets in the wake of the subprime and other fiascos, it is also designed to bolster the banks' ability to extend credit (put very crudely, banks can lend out only a given multiple of their capital). The Fed has been pumping extra liquidity into the broader system for a while now, but until now this has failed to do much to stimulate lending. The new money has, so to speak, been trapped under the debris of shattered confidence and crumbling financial institutions. The banks were too panicked and too capital-constrained to

Mr. Stuttaford is a contributing editor of NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE.

ROMAN GERNI

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put this cash properly to work. Direct investment in them by the government is meant to deal with both concerns.

What the banks do with these fresh resources will be a critical test of how Paulson's program is working. Equally, the response in Washington to the banks' actions will be an excellent early signal of the extent to which this country's politicians can be trusted with the power that the bailout has, potentially, now given them. In a way, America's bankers find themselves in a position resembling that of Eastern Europeans "liberated" by the Red Army in 1944–45: grateful that one evil is being seen off but anxious about what their rescuers might want and, for that matter, how long they plan on staying.

In this respect, Paulson's comments have been reassuring: "We don't want to run banks." And if he's talking the talk, he's walking the walk too. The government is buying preferred shares with (basically) no voting rights attached. There is no entitlement to board representation, and after three years the shares can be bought back by the banks that issued them. A dividend that increases sharply after five years gives the banks some (but possibly not enough) incentive to do just that, as do a number of restrictions on compensation, share buybacks, and common-stock dividends. It is true that the government also receives warrants to buy common stock, but giving the taxpayers the opportunity to profit from their investment seems only fair—and may also have been a political necessity. It's to be hoped that the Treasury will not hang on to any such common stock for too long. *Hoped?* Yup, I'm afraid that's the best we can expect.

The Treasury's scheme thus envisages a relationship that is, as it should be, both at arm's length and, for the most part, strictly temporary. That's a far cry from what is popularly understood by "nationalization" and is, of itself, something to watch carefully (and skeptically) but not, necessarily, to dread. Unfortunately, this might not continue to be the case. With the economy tanking, any prudent bank should tighten lending standards; not to do so is asking for trouble. To do so, however, might enrage the politicians who have just approved giving these banks a great deal of public money. The French have already faced this issue head-on, and the banks blinked. Any French bank that accepted a recent infusion of subordi-

nated debt from the French government had to agree to increase its total lending by 3 to 4 percent over a designated twelve-month period. The Brits are stumbling in the same direction. Gordon Brown's government, which now finds itself owner or part-owner of a quite remarkable collection of banks, has promised to keep its distance from its new charges while simultaneously insisting (to borrow the words of Brown's chancellor of the exchequer) that "the availability of lending to homeowners and small businesses will be maintained to at least 2007 levels." Quite what "availability," a word of vintage New Labour ambiguity, actually means is anyone's guess.

Similar issues will arise over here. Sen. Chris Dodd, the Connecticut Democrat who is chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, has warned that if the banks are "hoarding [cash] . . . there will be hell to pay." Meanwhile, New York's Chuck Schumer and two other Democratic senators have been busy arguing that the Treasury ought to set lending goals based on "previous lending activity," a recommendation (echoed, incidentally, by the committee's highest-ranking Republican, Alabama's Richard Shelby) that shows that they understand little about the economics of banking and even less about the undesirability of political meddling in this area. The lessons of Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and the Community Reinvestment Act have, it seems, yet to be learned.

With the economy facing an alarming deflationary threat, there is a good case to be made for another round of pump-priming by Washington, but any such moves should be arranged directly, openly, and accountably. Messing yet again with the way banks lend is an invitation to repeat the catastrophic errors of recent years, at a time when a fragile financial system has scant room for more disasters. America's banks need a more unified, more realistic, and smarter regulatory regime, and that's a proper area for government action, but the allocation of credit should be left to bankers and the market. Given some time, bank lending will again reach the levels that the business cycle dictates it should, and we will then be closer to a healthy, and lasting, recovery.

Whether a new administration is prepared to give banks that time is a completely different, and profoundly worrying, question.

NR

■ PHILANTHROPY

Giving Liberally

A husband and wife get into left-wing giving, in a big way

JOHN J. MILLER

WHEN Wachovia bought Golden West Financial two years ago, the man who was the big bank's CEO at the time couldn't contain his enthusiasm. Kennedy Thompson hailed the \$25 billion acquisition as a "grand slam home run" for Wachovia. Today the deal looks more like a strikeout in the bottom of the ninth.

The problem is that Golden West, then the nation's second-largest savings-and-loan, had specialized in adjustable-rate mortgages—and it "had been lending to people with weaker credit scores in places where housing prices are in decline, such as California and Florida," according to a recent story in the *Wall Street Journal*. In other words, the company was a ticking time bomb. Everything exploded in September.

If Wachovia purchased Golden West at precisely the wrong time, it follows that Golden West sold itself at precisely the right time. The biggest beneficiaries were Herbert and Marion Sandler, the husband-and-wife team who took over a small thrift in 1963 and turned it into one of the country's most successful financial firms. They walked away from the sale with \$2.4 billion, the bulk of which they tucked into a private foundation. Today, the Sandler Foundation is one of the leading sponsors of left-wing activism in the United States, spending millions upon millions of dollars on groups whose activities undermine the economic system that made the foundation's existence possible.

The Sandlers met on Wall Street, where Herb was a real-estate lawyer and Marion analyzed securities. They married in 1961 and moved to California's Bay Area. In 1963, they bought a savings-and-loan that had two branches, 25 employees, and \$34 million in assets. For more than four

decades, their story was one of vibrant growth. The Sandlers focused on making residential loans and earned a reputation for sound management and small-“c” conservatism. Their aversion to risk helped them avoid the S&L collapse of the 1980s. It even made them wary of ATMs: They refused to install these newfangled devices until the 1990s because they feared that the costs outweighed the benefits.

Herb was the able administrator and Marion the master marketer. They became darlings of the financial media, which delighted in their humble roots and the charming way they finished each other’s sentences. Marion became famous for knitting sweaters during business meetings. They were mom-and-pop tycoons. When they sold to Wachovia—at the time, Herb was 74 and Marion was 75—Golden West had more than 11,000 workers and \$125 billion in assets. The Sandlers owned a little more than 10 percent of the company.

After collecting their windfall, the Sandlers donated \$1.3 billion to their San Francisco–based foundation. It was the second-largest philanthropic gift of 2006, behind only Warren Buffett’s headline-grabbing donation of \$31 billion to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “If our dreams come true, we’ll give every last dollar away,” Herb had told *Forbes* a couple of years earlier. That’s what they set about doing.

The Sandlers weren’t rookies at philanthropy. In 1991, they had established the Sandler Family Supporting Foundation (it recently simplified its name to the Sandler Foundation). By 1997, the foundation was giving away \$5.5 million annually, according to IRS records. It donated to middle-of-the-road charities such as the United Way and mainstream cultural institutions such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Yet a sizable portion of its funds bankrolled a hodgepodge of left-wing advocacy groups, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (\$100,000), the National Women’s Law Center (\$100,000), and the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy (\$100,000).

This penchant was no surprise to anybody who knew the Sandlers, who are liberal partisans. Over the last decade or so, they’ve given hundreds of donations to Democratic campaigns around the coun-

try, totaling nearly \$900,000, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. If you were a Democrat seeking federal office in recent years and you didn’t get a check from the Sandlers, you were doing something wrong. The couple was even more generous with left-wing “Section 527” advocacy committees (which are named for the legal provision creating them). In 2004, they provided more than \$13 million to organizations such as Citizens for a Strong Senate (\$8.5 million) and MoveOn.org (\$2.5 million). Only three people, including George Soros, contributed more. In this cycle, their son-in-law, Steve Phillips, is chairman of Vote Hope, a political-action committee dedicated to the election of Barack Obama.

Yet their left-wing philanthropy has come to dwarf their political contributions. One of the Sandlers’ top recipients is Human Rights Watch—they’ve given it more than \$23 million over the last decade. HRW protests the actions of repressive regimes from Burma to Congo, but its vision is fundamentally of the Left: It crusades for granting legal rights to terrorists, opposes capital punishment under any circumstances, and believes that abortion services are “first and foremost a human right.” The group manages to find oppression in the most unexpected places. In August, it published an extensive report on discipline problems in U.S. public schools—and many teachers and parents would be surprised to learn that the trouble isn’t a lack of discipline, but rather too much of it, in the form of corporal punishment: “Even students who are not punished find themselves in a hostile, violent environment designed to instill fear.” Sounds like Gitmo!

The runaway success of Golden West allowed the Sandlers to make plenty of other large grants. Last year, they backed the creation of ProPublica, a non-profit news service that promises to produce “investigative journalism in the public interest.” It remains to be seen what will come of this venture, though ProPublica’s

board of directors and an advisory board of journalists are jam-packed with liberals. The Sandlers have pledged to support ProPublica with \$10 million per year.

That’s just a drop in the bucket compared with what may lie ahead. The Sandlers don’t want their foundation to hoard its endowment. Instead, they want to shovel money out the door right now. “We need to get our spending up to between \$200 and \$250 million a year,” Herb Sandler told the *New York Times* in March. During the fiscal year that ended in June 2007, they gave away more than \$80 million, up from \$28 million a year earlier.

One of their longtime favorite causes is medical research on asthma (Marion suffers from it), but they have also continued to push an ideological agenda. “They’re among the biggest left-wing donors out there,” says Justin Wilson of ActivistCash.com, a watchdog group. Records indicate that the Sandlers have pumped more than \$12 million into the American Civil Liberties Union. John Podesta’s Center for American Progress, which aspires to become a liberal counterweight to the Heritage Foundation, took in about \$11 million. The foundation also gave nearly \$7 million to the American Institute for Social Justice, which is closely tied to ACORN, the radical group of anti-corporate “community organizers.”

Topping all these groups, however, is the Center for Responsible Lending. Through the middle of last year, the Sandler Foundation had given

nearly \$20 million to the CRL, whose idea of “responsible lending” does not include loans that make economic sense for banks and their investors, but rather loans that fulfill the Left’s notion of social justice. The CRL is a professional grievance organization that concentrates on accusations of racial redlining. In recent weeks, its main project has been to defend the Community Reinvestment Act, which encouraged subprime lending, against charges that it played any role in Wall Street’s financial crisis. “These are the very people who have destroyed the American

The Sandler Foundation is spending millions upon millions of dollars on groups whose activities undermine the economic system that made the foundation’s existence possible.

credit system,” says Jerry Bowyer, the chief economist at BenchMark Financial Network.

On October 4, *Saturday Night Live* featured a skit on the financial meltdown. Along the way, it lampooned the Slanders as predatory lenders who had profited from the misfortunes of others. Herb Sandler was outraged: “We are being unfairly tarred,” he said in an Associated Press interview the next day. His frustration was understandable: A caption beneath the actors who played the couple read, “People who should be shot.” NBC later edited the segment, and these words are missing from the video on *SNL*’s website.

But Sandler was concerned about more than just a distasteful line. He argued that he and Marion were blameless in the annihilation of Wachovia. To be sure, nobody has accused them or Golden West of deceiving their buyers. Although a few financial analysts sounded alarms at the time of the deal, most regarded Golden West so highly that they didn’t see a downside. Then, about a year ago, Wachovia’s stock began its fatal nosedive. The crash came this September, as federal regulators stepped in to negotiate the sale of what was left of the bank.

Last year, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Herb Sandler explained his political impulses: “I am deeply opposed to wealthy people who exploit the poor, powerful people who prey on the weak, and government representatives who betray the trust of the people they supposedly represent.” He may want to visit the folks in Charlotte, N.C., where Wachovia has its headquarters and where the locals are worried about economic ruin. “Nobody around here knows what to expect,” says Warren Cooksey, a Charlotte city councilman who works for Wachovia. “There’s going to be some job loss. We’re hoping for a minimal impact, but there’s no sense in sugar-coating this.” Adds Tony Plath, a finance professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte: “For people who denigrate capitalism as much as the Slanders do, they sure did benefit from it. Maybe they should give some of the money back—to Wachovia’s shareholders.”

Don’t count on it. Thanks to the Slanders, Wachovia’s loss is the American Left’s gain.

NR

■ PUBLIC POLICY

The Specter Called ‘John Maynard’

When will Democrats learn that shoveling money around does not stimulate growth?

STEPHEN SPRUIELL

I N a 1965 article for *Time* magazine on the pervasive influence of British economist John Maynard Keynes, Milton Friedman was quoted as saying, “We are all Keynesians now.” This came as a shock—the equivalent of Paul Krugman coming out as a supply-sider today.

Friedman later explained that he had been quoted out of context. He meant that economists had adopted Keynes’s “language and apparatus,” not Keynes’s conclusions, chief among which was that the government should use fiscal policy to steer the economy (for example, cutting taxes and increasing spending to fight economic contractions). Regarding this, Friedman said, “no one is a Keynesian any longer.”

Try telling that to Nancy Pelosi. The Democratic House speaker is hard at work on a round of Keynesian stimulus intended to steer the U.S. economy back into the clear. This follows the stimulus that Congress passed, and President Bush signed, last February. But the old stimulus did not prevent the recession, and a new stimulus will not end it.

President Bush signed the old stimulus into law because it consisted mostly of tax rebates. Rebates are slightly preferable to other forms of Keynesian stimulus, but they are still not very effective. One-off rounds of checks mailed to taxpayers in the midst of an economic slowdown tend to be saved, not spent. It is hard to isolate the effects of the rebates, but in polls, just over 20 percent of recipients said they would spend the money, which would

account for the small bump in consumer spending seen in the spring.

The best that can be said of the February stimulus package is that it delayed the recession a bit, perhaps. It could not have done more, because it did not address the recession’s cause: a convulsion in the credit markets caused by falling home prices and rising mortgage-default rates.

Democrats now claim that a second stimulus—which they have been calling for since June—could address the recession’s effects, in particular a recent and rapid drop in consumer spending, which indicates that the problems have spread from the financial sector to the economy as a whole. With that goal in mind, Democrats want the second package to be lighter on the rebates and heavier on the spending—the idea is that while individuals might choose to save rebates, government spending lands directly in the economy.

A veto threat persuaded Democrats to drop most of their spending requests from the last package, but Barack Obama’s lead in the polls has them convinced that if Bush won’t acquiesce to their demands this time, they can just run out the clock. Democratic congressman Barney Frank has made this explicit. “There’s no question the House will pass . . . a much bigger [stimulus plan] than we passed before,” he told the Associated Press. “If enough Republicans in the Senate decide to filibuster it . . . we’ll just wait until January.”

President Bush has signaled that he would be willing to sign a stimulus bill, but he has balked at the level of spending the Democrats have proposed. Reports put the figure anywhere from \$150 billion to \$300 billion. The Democrats’ starting point would be a \$61 billion stimulus bill the House passed in late September (but which died in the Senate). That bill included new infrastructure spending, expanded unemployment benefits, and a fiscal bailout for states that are struggling to pay their share of Medicaid.

Whatever merits these policies may have, none of them is likely to stimulate the economy, for precisely the reason that Keynesian stimulus never works: The government cannot put money into the economy without first taking money out of the economy.

Take infrastructure spending, for exam-



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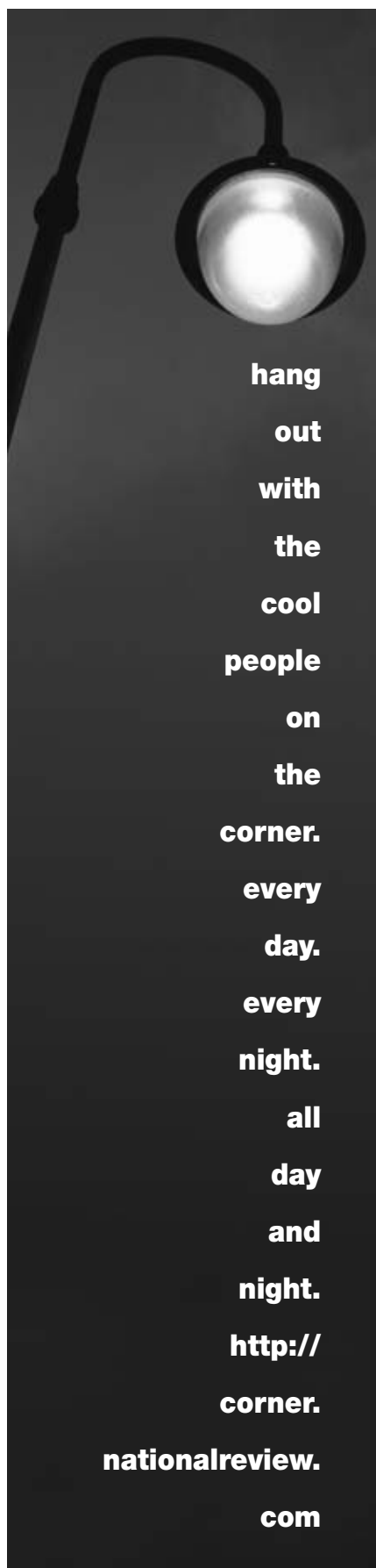
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ple. One claim in its defense holds that every \$1 billion spent on construction creates approximately 35,000 jobs. But the government has to get that \$1 billion from taxing or borrowing, which leaves less investment capital available to create jobs in the private sector. Keynesians might respond that disorder in the financial markets is preventing investors from financing job creation, so the government has to do it. But at this point, the only way to fix the financial markets is to keep money in them and get it flowing to its most productive uses again—that should be the government’s highest priority. Taking money out and putting it into infrastructure would only delay the recovery.

Proponents of infrastructure spending also argue that new roads and bridges would stimulate the economy by easing congestion. But those benefits would take years to materialize, if they materialized at all. The unfortunate reality of infrastructure spending in the U.S. is that Congress already spends too many federal highway dollars on pork projects that offer few real benefits. We do not want to have billions of dollars tied up building bridges to nowhere when the credit markets start to unfreeze.

There are similar problems with the Democrats’ other spending proposals. Extending unemployment benefits through the downturn might be a good idea for other reasons, but it wouldn’t stimulate economic growth: It would provide an incentive for job-seekers to delay reentry into the workforce. A fiscal bailout for states that blew out their budgets is a terrible idea: A few states have expanded Medicaid beyond what they can pay for, and others have simply mismanaged their funds. These states need to get their houses in order, and a bailout would only encourage them to keep indulging in politically popular but unaffordable spending.

Making tax rebates part of this package would not make it easier to swallow. Stimulating the economy through tax policy is all about providing the right incentives for growth—for example, letting people keep more of their money as an incentive for them to work. By contrast, rebate checks are cut after the work is done, so there’s no effect on incentives. The checks also don’t add to the national income (they transfer money from U.S. government bondholders to consumers).

As long as we’re adding to the deficit, it’s best to do so by cutting taxes.

To that end, House Republicans have offered an alternative stimulus package that looks much more attractive. The GOP alternative would double the child tax credit, rewarding families that are investing in the next generation of workers. It would zero out the capital-gains tax to encourage investment and repair damaged retirement portfolios. And it would include tax breaks for businesses, giving them a way to save money that doesn’t involve layoffs.

Most important, the Republican plan would cut the corporate-tax rate from 35 to 25 percent. This is the same cut John McCain has touted throughout his campaign, and it would do more to stimulate the economy than anything the Democrats have proposed. U.S. corporate taxes are exorbitantly high. No country should put its own industries at such a disadvantage, but corporations are easy targets for revenue-hungry pols. Obama has attacked McCain for the “\$200 billion that he’s going to give to big corporations.” Such rhetoric masks the fact that corporations are not taxpayers but tax collectors; they pass all their costs through to their consumers.

If John McCain pulls out the miracle win, Pelosi and Co. would have to deal with Bush or McCain if they wanted to pass a stimulus package. Under those circumstances, Republicans in Congress could probably restrain the Democrats, cut out some wasteful spending, and even add a few pro-growth tax cuts.

But if Obama wins, there won’t be much that congressional Republicans can do. The Democrats could wait until January to pass their dream package, and conservative Senate Republicans would be forced to filibuster a bill that includes tax rebates, among other attractive prizes. Such an effort would probably not succeed—and could only happen if there were enough Republican senators to filibuster to begin with.

The stimulus bill would be just the beginning. A President Obama would push for a new, more active role for government in every area of the economy. On balance, the last three decades have belonged to Milton Friedman, not Keynes. Keynes could now be poised for a big comeback.

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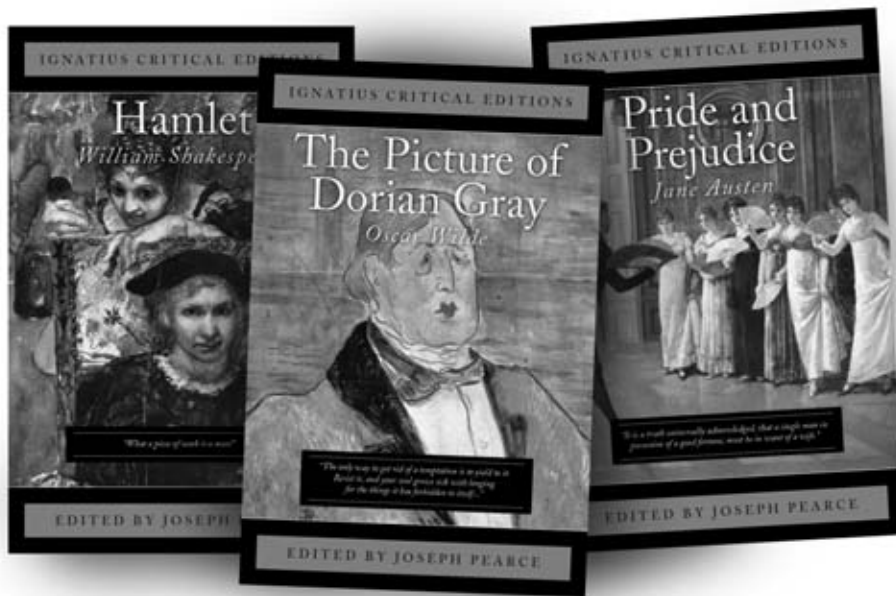
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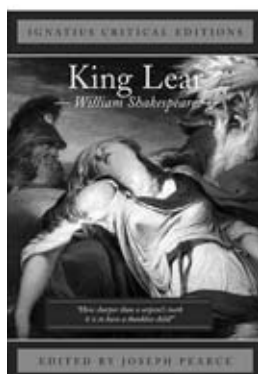
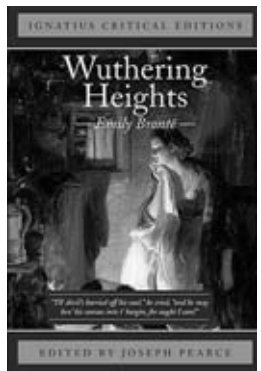
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HAVA Megillah

When it comes to voting, medium tech can be better than high

FRED SCHWARZ

AFTER the Florida election of 2000, which exposed many flaws in the way Americans cast and count votes, everybody in Washington agreed that something had to be done. Situations like that are always dangerous. The result was the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, which caused election officials across the country to rush out and buy fancy new touch-screen voting machines. Now many of those officials are having second thoughts.

In the last two years, several states, including California, Florida, Iowa, and Ohio, have partially or completely banned direct-recording electronic (DRE) systems, as they are officially known. Many individual counties elsewhere have followed suit. Machines have frozen up, broken down, or yielded obviously incorrect results (equipment makers say many of these problems were caused by “human error,” which is geekspeak for “bad software design”). Meanwhile, a parade of hackers have shown how easily DRE software can be compromised, intentionally or by accident, and websites provide long lists of botched elections.

This year an estimated 57 percent of America’s voters will use hand-marked paper ballots, the great bulk of which will be read by optical scanners. That’s a big increase from the 30 percent who used them in 2000 and 34 percent in 2004. Another 36 percent will use DREs, down from a peak of 44 percent two years ago. Most of the remainder, mainly in New York state, will vote on creaky old lever-operated machines, with a few jurisdictions still using punch cards or hand-counted ballots. Not long ago, the trend toward DRE voting seemed unstoppable; now it has been reversed. What went wrong?

As usually occurs with consensus solutions to widely acknowledged failures, HAVA attacked the wrong problem. The trouble with the 2000 Florida election, besides a confusing ballot design, was the use of punch cards. These are bad for a number of reasons: You can’t change your vote if you make a mistake; a partially punched hole might not register on the counter; and if you accidentally punch holes for two candidates in the same race, your vote will be nullified. Those flaws combined to yield a distressingly high rate of spoiled ballots and way too much ambiguity when the ballots were examined visually.

A sensible solution would have been to (a) ban punch cards (which in 2002 were still being used in 454 of the nation’s 3,114 counties), (b) require that every system permit voters to review their selections and prevent them from casting multiple votes, and (c) perhaps come up with some tips on ballot design. Congress could have allowed a decade or so to make the switch, made money available for conversion costs, and let local officials handle the details.

Instead, HAVA sweepingly invalidated most voting equipment then in use, established a swarm of boards and committees to deepen the confusion, required every voting system to create an “audit trail” (commonly called a “paper trail”) to verify its results, appropriated \$3 billion to pay for new equipment, and mandated compliance by the 2006 elections (though extensions have been granted in some cases). The resulting mess has buried local officials under a blizzard of paperwork and lawsuits while doing nothing to increase ballot accuracy or security.

After HAVA effectively banned punch cards and lever machines, the only choices available to most election boards were optical-scan and DRE. In optical-scan, voters fill in a circle or make some other mark on a preprinted card, like students taking a standardized test. The ballot is read by a scanner, either as soon as the card is marked or at the end of the day (if it’s done immediately, the voter can be alerted if he has made a mistake). In these systems, the ballots themselves are the paper trail.

In a DRE, the list of candidates’ names (or other options) appears on a computer screen, usually one contest at a time. After

completing all the races, propositions, and so forth, the voter reviews a summary of the votes he has cast and can change them before accepting the ballot as final. DREs require no paper ballots; they are easier to adapt for multiple languages and voting by the handicapped; and they do away with the problems of stray or faint marks, erasures, and other ambiguities that can occur with hand-marked ballots.

With all these benefits, it’s no surprise that DREs started gaining favor as computers became cheaper and more familiar to the public. This began before HAVA: About 13 percent of voters used DREs in 2000, and 23 percent in 2002. HAVA did not explicitly require the use of DREs, but it accelerated the trend toward them; as long as you’re replacing your voting machines, why buy something as old-fashioned and high-schoolish as optical-scan? Another consideration was that DREs require a higher initial investment than optical-scan but have lower operating costs, mainly because they eliminate printing. If you’re an election official and someone gives you a big pile of money, you’re going to spend it on the big-ticket item that reduces your future expenses, instead of keeping excess cash around where budget cutters can see it.

The trouble with computers, of course, is that they don’t always work. The problems DREs encounter when used by poorly trained poll workers and inexperienced voters instead of company demonstrators have created severe doubts, among computer scientists as well as conspiracy theorists, about whether they can be made safe against software flaws, inadvertent or malicious. (Optical-scan systems also use computers, but not as extensively as DREs, so they leave less room for hacking and errors.)

Thus the requirement of a paper trail. When a voter has finished voting, the DRE prints out and stores a summary of his choices. In some systems, this paper record is kept on a scroll hidden inside the machine, but in a “voter-verified paper trail,” the paper copy appears behind a window, where the voter can check it for accuracy.

That sounds great, but more than a few people think the paper trail is not only unnecessary but counterproductive. Some scholars and officials complain that a paper trail undermines confidence in com-

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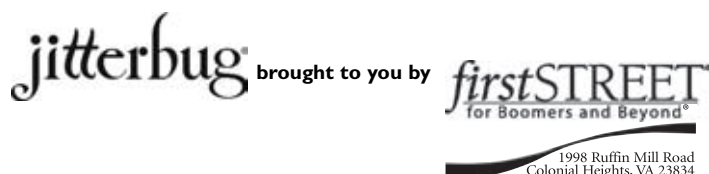
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puters, while others say it provides a false sense of security. For one thing, it is produced by the same software that produces the unverified tally, so it's not an independent check. A host of low-tech problems, accidental or malicious, such as paper jams, running out of paper or toner, or the always reliable lost box of ballots, can compromise the paper trail's value. And even when voters have a chance to verify their votes, studies have shown that very few of them bother to look at the paper copy.

Rebecca Mercuri, the president of Notable Software, a forensic and consulting firm, originated the idea of a voter-verified paper trail back in 1992 while researching her doctoral thesis. After seeing DREs in action, however, she now calls it "just a panacea to allay the rightful fears about the defective technology." Mercuri has come to favor public hand-counting of paper ballots, saying that "less computerization and better human checks and balances is the only way to increase security."

There's nothing inherently wrong with the idea of voting on DREs. If designed and used properly, they could be as reliable as any other method, and in the long term, a widespread shift to them seems likely. But it will probably be a very long term, and a major rethink will be required. As *Popular Mechanics* pointed out in 2004, "most states already have a highly reliable, tamperproof, networked system that provides users with anonymity and a bar-coded paper receipt: The state lottery system. But none of the major players in the e-voting machine business have a lottery background; instead, they came from the worlds of bank ATMs, voting supplies and medical devices." The two situations are not directly comparable; for one thing, the same no-frills entry blank is used to get a Powerball or Mega Millions ticket everywhere in the country. But lottery software is designed with security and verifiability as its primary and inflexible requirements, while in electoral software, all too often, they are afterthoughts.

**HAVA,
with its
ham-fisted
combination
of inflexible
standards,
unrealistic
goals, and
arbitrary
deadlines,
was used
to force
touch-screen
voting down
the throats
of unwilling
voters.**

Today's DREs aren't ready for real-world use because HAVA, with its crisis mentality, didn't allow them time to get there. "HAVA created a top-heavy, unwieldy governance structure," says Doug Jones, a computer scientist at the University of Iowa who studies voting systems, and then "Congress made things worse by fully funding the purchase of new machines before they provided even inadequate funds for the Election Assistance Commission to oversee standards development."

Another result, as Jones points out, was that HAVA "created a feeding frenzy among voting-system vendors, and one consequence of this is that they threw their weight into playing the game of regulatory capture. As a result, the standards process we have in place today is strongly biased toward protecting the status quo. New vendors have an extremely difficult time breaking into the market." And new blood is exactly what the industry needs, because at this point it doesn't just have to make its systems reliable; it also has to convince a highly skeptical public of their reliability.

A parallel can be found in America's experience with nuclear power. Its advantages are undeniable, but in the 1960s and 1970s, it was rolled out too fast, with heavy government encouragement, before many important engineering issues were resolved. The result was a high-profile failure at Three Mile Island that gave the industry a bad reputation it still hasn't shaken.

In similar fashion, HAVA, with its ham-fisted combination of inflexible standards, unrealistic goals, and arbitrary deadlines, was used to force touch-screen voting down the throats of unwilling voters. Instead, it has probably delayed their eventual acceptance by a generation. In the meantime, most of America will continue to get by with optical-scan systems—which, though hardly perfect, are sturdy and reliable, after several decades of experience during which users could work out the kinks.

NR

■ PUBLIC POLICY III

Toll Talk

Congestion pricing is the cure for our overcrowded highways

ROBERT VERBRUGGEN

TEN years ago, Florida's Lee County had a congestion problem. Cape Coral served as a bedroom community for the nearby business hub, Fort Myers, and to get between the two, workers had to cross the Caloosahatchee River. The Cape Coral and Midpoint bridges were reliably clogged during rush hour.

But through the federal government, the county secured funds for an experiment: It would adjust the bridges' tolls based on the time of day. Those who drove during the "shoulder periods" just before and just after rush hour would get a discount—and, hopefully, some rush-hour commuters would change their schedules to save money.

"There was some skepticism," says Chris Swenson, who managed the project for the county. "But we took some surveys after the program was up and running a few months, and the response was over 70 percent positive. We had a good number of neutral responses, but those who didn't like it were less than 10 percent." Research at the University of South Florida indicated that the shoulder periods had indeed lured customers away from rush hour. The bridges use variable tolls to this day.

Unfortunately, despite passing this test with flying colors, congestion pricing didn't catch on nationwide. It shows: The average American peak-period commuter lost 38 hours and 26 gallons of gas to congestion in 2005, according to the Texas Transportation Institute.

There are significant roadblocks to implementing congestion pricing, but a new Department of Transportation report endorses the concept—and suggests the federal government encourage it in its next surface-transportation law. The current law expires September 30, 2009, so the proposal's fate lies in the hands of the next administration and Congress. They should enact it.



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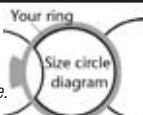
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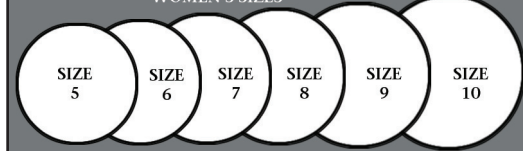
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WOMEN'S SIZES



Lee County's method—varying tolls depending on the time of day—isn't the only way to charge for congestion. One can also add a lane to a highway, charge drivers to use it, and leave the original highway as it was. Or, charge users to enter, or to commute within, the busiest areas of a city. Instead of using time of day to estimate congestion, one can measure traffic directly and charge more as the road gets busier.

These ideas often beget several objections. The first is that roads are clogged because people need to get to jobs, and people with jobs cannot change their schedules—congestion pricing will cost drivers money, but won't fix the problem.

Two, even when congestion pricing is unfair to the poor, it's arguably a less unfair way of funding highways than the current system. Gas taxes provide the greatest source of highway revenue, and are regressive, meaning that on average the poor pay a higher amount relative to their income.

Three, current technology makes it easy to charge different people different tolls—increasingly, in-car transponders and license-plate-recognition systems are replacing toll booths. These technologies could be used to give the poor a break on congestion prices—and all concerns about fairness would evaporate.

friendly speeds (most vehicles get maximum gas mileage around 65 mph) and spent less time idling through traffic jams.

Also, more efficient highways mean less construction. "If you put 40 percent more cars through, it stands to reason that you'd have to build 40 percent fewer new lanes or 40 percent less new infrastructure," says transportation secretary Mary Peters. "You still may need to add some, but in the short term you get more out of the roads you have."

So what's getting in the way of congestion pricing? One factor is that no one has convinced the public of these benefits. Until the state assembly shot it down



The Lee County example goes a long way toward refuting this, especially considering that the peak-period toll was \$1 (shoulder-period users saved only 50 cents). Also, the Environmental Defense Fund reported traffic drops of 15 percent in Stockholm and 45 percent in Singapore, and 30 percent less congestion in London, once those cities went to congestion pricing.

Another common complaint is that even if it works, congestion pricing is unfair to the poor: They are more likely to have to adjust their routes because they are unable to pay the higher fee, and if they do pay the fee, it hits them harder. This is a noble concern, but for three reasons it's unwarranted.

One, in some cases, it's simply not true. When California added congestion-priced express lanes to the 91 Freeway in Orange County, researchers found that it was mainly the rich and middle class who paid extra to use them. The poor still drove on the free lanes, which were clogged by fewer BMWs.

Also bear in mind that there are side benefits to congestion pricing. For one, the gas tax is failing to provide enough revenue for highway projects; receipts have declined as fuel efficiency has increased, a problem tolls don't face. In addition, because congestion prices rise as traffic increases, they provide a good barometer of the demand for a given road. When congestion fees get unreasonably high, this indicates to the government—and prompts toll payers to indicate to the government—that it's time to expand the road.

And it's a green solution, in more ways than one. Congestion pricing can raise money for public transportation. When people combine or eliminate trips to avoid paying peak fares, not only do their cars not pollute, but other cars pollute less: On the aforementioned 91 Freeway, the congestion-priced lanes saw 40 percent greater "throughput," or cars per hour, meaning that cars traveled at more gas-

in April, New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg advocated a plan to charge \$8 to drive a car south of 86th Street in Manhattan between 6 A.M. and 6 P.M. on weekdays (a compromise moved the cut-off to 60th Street before the plan failed). Quinnipiac University polled city voters frequently on the issue, and consistently found majority opposition.

Another reason is that the federal government funds many highways—most importantly the interstate system, on which Americans do a quarter of their highway driving, but also many state highways. On these roads, the government does not allow congestion pricing unless the state manages to join what DOT assistant secretary for transportation policy Tyler Duvall calls a "myriad" of federal pilot programs. One (the Value Pricing Pilot Program that Lee County took advantage of) covers 15 states, but it's much harder to get permission for congestion pricing in the other 35.



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This means a lot of good projects are out of the question.

The former problem will abate as the public learns more about the issue, as happened both in Lee County and in Stockholm, which held a congestion-pricing trial period in 2006. Beforehand, a poll indicated only 31 percent support. After the trial, a majority voted to keep the system.

Also, even in polls where congestion pricing doesn't do well, there is a glimmer of hope: Different questions provoke different answers. When given the option, drivers prefer tolls to gas taxes. And in the Quinnipiac polls of New Yorkers, a majority said they would support congestion pricing *if* the money raised went to fund mass transit. (This approach might not work elsewhere—the New York area contains 40 percent of the nation's mass-transit users, so proposals that appeal to this constituency are unusually popular there.)

The DOT's proposed policies would eliminate the toll restrictions on federally funded highways. There would be limits—the money raised would have to be used to fund highways; there would be more restrictions for tolls on uncongested highways, and non-variable tolls on congested highways. But this would give the green light to countless projects.

What are the odds that the DOT's plans will see a president's signature? "At the federal level, we're not seeing a lot of recognition of the problem," says Duvall. "It will take a lot of state and local mobilization." Also, Congress has a track record of refusing to deal with transportation issues: It delayed for 22 months the transportation bill currently in effect, extending the old budget to tide the DOT over. (Bush finally signed the bill in 2005.)

Still, there are reasons for optimism. Due to declines in gas-tax revenue, the department has already needed an \$8 billion supplement to its funding, so kicking the can on the new transportation bill won't be so easy. And as much as the public dislikes tolls, it is coming to realize that the current transportation system isn't working. More and more governments are experimenting with congestion pricing, discovering it works, and acting as models for other projects. As boredom and frustration mount on the nation's highways, these reforms are all but inevitable.

NR

■ CULTURE WATCH

'A Perpetual Hissing'

Notes on an unfavorable practice

JAY NORDLINGER

A FEW nights ago, I had an interesting hissing experience. I was in a movie theater, and a preview for *W.* came on—this is the film about President Bush by Oliver Stone, the leftist director. The hissing was very strange: sort of tentative, unsure. It seemed to me that my neighbors were confused. They wanted to hiss the subject of the film, Bush, because they hate him. But they didn't want to hiss the film itself—which they were sure to like. They were kind of caught. So what came out of them was a half hissing, or trial hissing: *Should we hiss or not, gang?* Amusing, actually.

But there is nothing amusing about hissing in general, as far as I'm concerned. It is one of my least favorite practices, and it may well be one of yours. I have written on this subject in my column for NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE from time to time. Once I wrote, "I grew up with the sound of the Left hissing." That was a bit of an exaggeration, but not much of one. In my hometown of Ann Arbor, Mich.—a small citadel of the Left—hissing was de rigueur. They hissed at what they didn't like, and what they didn't like was usually conservative, or politically incorrect, or otherwise nonconforming. They especially hissed in movie theaters—not the ones out in the malls, but the ones on campus. (The University of Michigan.)

When I wrote specifically about Ann Arbor and hissing, I received an e-mail from Gilbert, Ariz. The man said, "I have heard hissing *only* in Ann Arbor. And it stands to reason that creepy ideological people should adopt this odious reptilian practice." He added that there was no hissing in Gilbert.

But there is definitely hissing beyond Ann Arbor! For example, it is common

on Manhattan's Upper West Side, where I live, and where I saw the preview for *W.* Hissing, wherever it takes place, is always, or almost always, hateful. It is sinister, menacing, sneaky, insidious. (Note how those words sound like hissing itself.) It is sort of anonymous, hiding itself, rather than being out in the open. I like what another reader—not from Gilbert—wrote me: "Hissing is underhanded, and it expresses disapproval without accountability. People can hiss with their lips and jaws in a neutral position—and they can drown out that which is disapproved while obscuring the source."

When people hiss as a group, the specter of the mob is raised: bullying, united, dangerous. Group hissing is an expression of groupthink. Booing, certainly by individuals, is far better, I believe: It is more forthright. But best, of course, is neither booing nor hissing. If you can't stand what is being presented, you can leave (i.e., vote with your feet).

Hissing is almost surely as old as man—who may well have gotten it from snakes. There is plenty of hissing in the Hebrew Bible, for example in Jeremiah: where people have been caused to "make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing." There is plenty of hissing in Shakespeare, too, where both snakes and people hiss—at speakers, at ideas, and so on. Caliban says, "Sometime am I all wound with adders who with cloven tongues do hiss me into madness." I know the feeling. And the hissing in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is horrible to ear, mind, and heart. Recall just one instance: when we hear "from innumerable tongues a dismal universal hiss, the sound of public scorn."

Now and then, hissing can be benign—as in vaudeville, when you hiss the villain, who has entered twirling his mustache. But how often do you watch vaudeville? In movie houses, my neighbors hiss anything and everything, starting with the ads for Coke. It's not just that they don't like ads in theaters, which is understandable; it's that they don't like all that Coke represents (or so I would wager). And, of course, they hiss anything they consider objectionable in the main feature itself. A man from Madison, Wis.—another small citadel of the Left—wrote me to say that

AS HEARD ON PAUL HARVEY NEWS

New advanced portable heater can cut your heating bill up to 50%

Heats a large room in minutes with even heat wall to wall and floor to ceiling

Does not get hot, cannot start a fire and will not reduce humidity or oxygen

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A new advanced quartz infrared portable heater, the EdenPURE™, can cut your heating bills by up to 50%.

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Unlike other heating sources, the EdenPURE™ cannot put poisonous carbon monoxide into a room or any type of fumes or any type of harmful radiation.

Q. What is the origin of this amazing heating element in the EdenPURE™?

A. This advanced heating element was discovered accidentally by a man named John Jones.

Q. What advantages does infrared quartz tube heating source have over other heating source products?

A. John Jones designed his heating source around the three most important consumer benefits: economy, comfort, and safety.

In the EdenPURE™ system, electricity is used to generate infrared light which, in turn, creates a very safe heat.



Cannot start a fire; a child or animal can touch or sit on it without harm



After a great deal of research and development, very efficient infrared heat chambers were developed that utilize three unique patented solid copper heat exchangers in one EdenPURE™ heater.

Q. How can a person cut their heating bill by up to 50% with the EdenPURE™?

A. The EdenPURE™ will heat a room in minutes. Therefore, you can turn the heat down in your house to as low as 50 degrees, but the room you are occupying, which has the EdenPURE™, will be warm and comfortable. The EdenPURE™ is portable. When you move to another room, it will quickly heat that room also. This can drastically cut heating bills, in some instances, by up to 50%.

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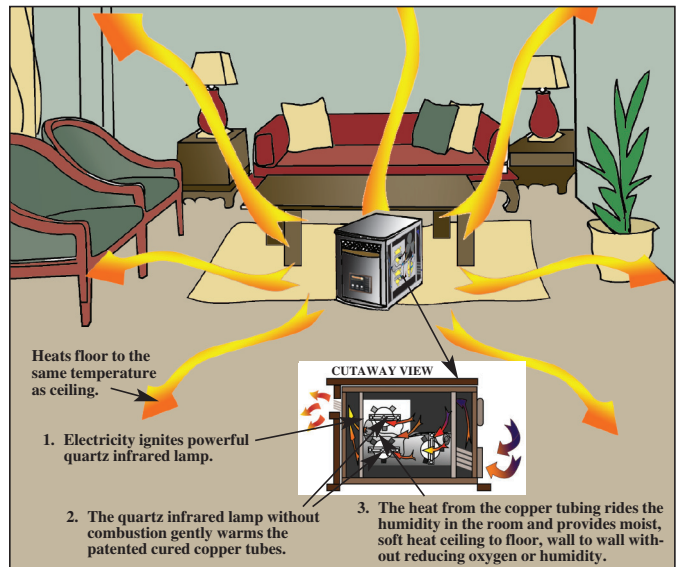
500 heats a room up to 300 square feet and GEN3 Model 1000 heats a room up to 1,000 square feet.

End of interview.

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he once tried rebuking his hissing neighbors. "Do you realize the actors can't hear you?" he said. "Or are you just advertising your virtue? Now that we know you're virtuous, can the rest of us enjoy the movie?"

One time, on the Upper West Side, there was no hissing—like the dog not barking. And it was so remarkable, I wrote about it in my NRO column, on June 24, 2002. An ad for the Marines came on before a movie. My stomach tightened: *Uh-oh*. And no one hissed. There was not so much as the beginning of an *ess*. I wrote that this showed something different about the culture, for surely they would have hissed pre-9/11. The non-hissing took place more than six years ago, of course. What would the Marines bring today?

I myself have been hissed a number of times—and not just when speaking about politics. I was hissed at the Salzburg Festival once! What happened was this: I was conducting a public interview of a famous singer, and I mentioned what had happened to song recitals: Everyone had to have a "theme" now, rather than a mixed program. "You know, you have songs to texts of Rilke, or songs about water, or songs by left-handed Hispanics." Most people laughed or chuckled—including the interviewee—but one woman (I think it was a woman, somehow) hissed. I have never forgotten that hiss: It cut through the general appreciation and good feeling like a knife.

It should give some comfort to know that even the best have been hissed. Do you know that Solzhenitsyn was hissed, when he gave his historic commencement address at Harvard? If you can hiss Solzhenitsyn—after his years in the Gulag, after what he struggled to bring to the world—you can hiss anybody. Of course, he faced a lot worse.

According to my e-mailers, Harvard—or more specifically, its law school—is, or was, a hotbed of hissing. (A snake's nest of hissing?) The *New York Times* has noted this, too. Last year, the paper published an article about Barack Obama at Harvard. And the article mentioned the ideological ardency of students, who would "boo and hiss one another in class." (Well, at least there was booing.)

A reader of mine recalled being at the law school in the mid-1980s: "one of a handful of conservatives speaking up against the party line in class." He was amazed to find that hissing was "a common tool used to drown out" disapproved opinion. "Things became so bad in our classes that the professors hosted a discussion of hissing, and, to their credit, discouraged the practice. It didn't help." But our reader had a nice story to share:

During my first year of law school, Ronald Reagan was campaigning for his second term in the White House. He showed up in Boston for what was billed as his final campaign appearance (in his own behalf). So my buddies and I decided to skip out of contracts class and attend. We did, and heard the great man at his best.

The next day in class, our (very liberal) professor announced that he had handed out an important assignment the day before, but that several students had been absent. He said there was a rumor that they had been in Boston attending a Reagan rally (much hissing). He then declared that if those students wanted a copy of the assignment, they would have to walk down to the front of the room (an auditorium-style lecture hall) and take one from his desk. He apparently thought we'd be too shamed to announce ourselves. We, of course, were proud of our views, and we all marched forward to get the assignment as our classmates hissed with great energy.

Not exactly heroic, but a great memory.

Well, if not exactly heroic—not exactly unheroic, either. Another reader wrote of her time as an undergrad at Stanford. She attended a Nader speech—and, before the great man came on, a local Green-party candidate warmed up the

crowd. He took an informal poll of the audience's party affiliations: About 95 percent identified themselves as Democrats; most of the rest said they were Green or unaffiliated. And "approximately ten of us identified ourselves as Republicans and were soundly hissed." Said this reader, "I often think that the experience of sitting (nearly) alone, surrounded by leftists and angry, meaningless noise, beautifully represents my undergraduate experience."

Would you care for something lighter? I have an instance of what you might call preemptive hissing. A Yale alum wrote about his experience in a production of *Iolanthe*. (Gilbert & Sullivan—not Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*.) A character, Lord Mountarat, says, "This comes of women interfering in politics." Our Yalie wrote, "We knew that the line would offend the audience—never mind that the line is ironic. The audience would simply have heard a sexist 19th-century white male. Our solution? As soon as Mountarat said the line, the women's chorus onstage hissed him. That got a big laugh—at least partly, I think, because the chorus looked and sounded exactly like the types we were worried about."

Finally, a different reader said, "At summer camp back in the '60s, the director prohibited hissing on the ground that the Nazis did that. (The camp was predominantly Jewish.) Have you ever heard anything like that?" I have not, no—but it's the kind of thing you like to think is true.

I must say, in all my years, I have never heard a conservative or conservatives hiss. Then again, I have probably hung around in the wrong places. And I was sort of touched by a note received from yet another reader not long ago—when I again addressed this subject in my column: "Every time you write about hissing, it makes me feel bad. We got to go see President Bush speak in Dallas, and when he would mention some awful Democrat, I would hiss. Now when you write about how distasteful it is, I wish I hadn't."

A few days from now, I will participate in a debate at Yale. Will there be hissing? Perhaps. But I'm done with the topic of the Left and hissing for now. Next up: the Left and Alger Hiss (a joke that, no doubt, deserves a hiss). **NR**



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Death By Rescue

How botched bailouts doomed companies that didn't need to fail

DONALD L. LUSKIN

THE road to hell is paved with bad interventions. This year's emergency sallies into the banking system by the Fed, the Treasury, the FDIC, and the SEC have backfired. They were intended to ameliorate a credit crisis and to keep it from spreading. Instead they've inflamed the crisis into an outright panic that now has spread around the world and triggered a recession.

Conservatives may rightly object to all this government meddling in private markets on general principle. But the more salient objection is that government has botched it. The attempts to deal with failures at Bear Stearns, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, AIG, Washington Mutual, and Wachovia were not rescues or bailouts at all—they were wipe-outs, seemingly intended more to punish than to rescue. They were government takings of private property for public use—seizures of shareholder wealth in troubled firms in the name of saving the system—without the just compensation promised in the Fifth Amendment and often beyond the legal authority of the government agencies involved.

Each of these seizures was ad hoc, and most were carried out over a weekend in secret. And each was handled differently, with no apparent rhyme or reason as to which agency would be involved, which firms would be saved and which wouldn't, or whose ox would be gored. Stockholders almost always got zeroed out. Bank depositors and insurance-policy holders were always saved. But for bondholders, commercial creditors, derivatives counterparties, and securities-account holders, it was totally arbitrary—different each time. And as often as not, these exercises had powerful unintended consequences, with the government fixing one trouble spot only to create another elsewhere in the system.

The fact that government agencies that should have been rescuers became destroyers instead—and the utter uncertainty about how and when these agencies would exercise their powers—caused investors' confidence to collapse. Federal agencies

unintentionally created an incentive structure that rewarded investor behavior that would exacerbate the crisis and punished behavior that would mitigate it.

'I'M FROM THE GOVERNMENT, AND I'M HERE TO HELP'

There were many causes of the credit crisis. Surely the Federal Reserve's keeping interest rates at below-market levels from 2002 to 2005 contributed to the undue growth of credit, and congressional mandates on Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac intended to encourage low-income home loans contributed to the deterioration of mortgage-lending standards. It is also obvious that many banks took imprudent positions, recklessly leveraging their balance sheets to the extent that even a small correction would lead to large losses that would then ripple through the markets, causing even more losses.

It is clear who bears responsibility for rescuing the global financial system from collapse as such excesses unwind. Through the establishment of safety-net institutions such as the Federal Reserve and the FDIC, the federal government presents itself as the rescuer. So when action becomes necessary, government must do its job and do it well—even if some banks have behaved recklessly, and even if they have done so precisely because they've known they would be rescued. If the *Titanic* is sinking, anyone who promised to save it must save it for the sake of all those on board, even if it means also saving the life of the negligent captain who rammed an iceberg.

Now that Treasury is armed with \$700 billion from Congress for more rescues, the risk is greater than ever that government will continue to make matters worse. Happily, it appears that Treasury secretary Henry Paulson has learned from past mistakes; so far, he is using his power wisely. Sadly, much of that power will have to go toward repairing damage from the botched rescues that went before.

The first major mistake, which established the template for all the mistakes to come, was Bear Stearns. In mid-March, Bear was beset by a classic bank run and faced failure. The Fed facilitated an emergency acquisition of Bear by JPMorgan Chase to head

Mr. Luskin is chief investment officer of Trend Macrolytics LLC, an economics and investment-research firm.

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The Economic Miracle of Israel

What does it mean to American investors?

Israel is a very small country – it is smaller by half than San Bernardino County in California. It would sink in Lake Michigan without a trace. It has barely 8 million citizens. It has been in existence for just 60 years. But it is an economic powerhouse.

What are the facts?

Steady Economic Growth. Ever since its creation in 1948, Israel has been involved in bloody warfare virtually without surcease. There were three or four “formal” wars, each of which Israel’s enemies promised to be a “war of extermination.” To use their favorite phrase, they vowed to “wipe Israel off the map.” Fortunately, none of this came to pass. Despite its small size and small population and being vulnerable from all sides, Israel has prevailed in all those wars. And it has survived the several “intifadas” imposed on it by the Palestinians. Despite that and despite gathering in millions of refugees from all over the world and despite having over one million Muslim Arab citizens, who do not serve in the military and who are openly hostile to their country, Israel has developed into an economic and industrial power that is admired in the world.

Impressive statistics can be cited. Here are just a few: Israel’s gross domestic product (GDP) was over \$170 billion in 2006. That works out to a per-capita product of over \$20,000. It compares favorably with most long-established established European countries and approaches that of the United States. The United States is Israel’s most important trading partner. In the most recent year for which reliable statistics are available, two-way trade amounted to about \$30 billion, representing a steady 10% yearly increase over the last several years. The principal exports from the United States include civilian aircraft, telecommunication equipment, semiconductors, and medical equipment. The two countries signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 1985, and an Agricultural Trade Agreement (ATA) in 1996. Israel also has free-trade agreements with the E.U., Turkey, Jordan, and Mexico. Other free trade agreements are in negotiation.

Israel’s main exports to the United States and the world at large are polished diamonds, electronic communication equipment, medical and scientific equipment, chemical products, agri-technology, and textiles.

A World Leader in Many Fields. In contrast to its Muslim enemies, who have virtually no indigenous industry, whose people are largely illiterate, but who have been blessed with natural riches through their almost limitless petroleum

resources, Israel has virtually no natural resources. Its principal resource is its people’s brain power. Israel’s universities and technical schools are world-class, most outstanding among them Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Technion in Haifa, which is considered to be on the same level as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The energy and resourcefulness that have enabled Israel to absorb millions of immigrants and to convert a desolate land into one of green fields and modern cities are also reflected in Israel’s economic development. Israel is a modern industrial

state whose output encompasses some of the most advanced and sophisticated technology in the world. Its industry is concentrated in high technology and high-added-value products,

based primarily on scientific and technological creativity and innovation.

Israel is a world leader in medical devices and medical electronics, military electronics, civilian and military aviation, agri-technology, telecommunications, computerized graphics, cellular telephones, microchip technology and voicemail technology, water technology and desalinization, and many others. It has 31 desalinization plants, including the largest in the world, located in Ashdod. Warren Buffett, perhaps America’s most astute investor has recently made a \$4.5 billion investment in an Israeli company. When asked why he chose Israel as his first investment outside of the United States, he replied, “Some Americans came looking for oil, so they didn’t stay in Israel. We came looking for brains, so we stayed in Israel.” Scores of Israeli stocks are traded on NASDAQ. Next to Canada, Israel is by far the most represented country on that exchange.

Domestic tranquility, a western legal system, the full infrastructure of transportation, communication and utilities, but primarily its educated and motivated population make Israel attractive to foreign investors and industry.

Virtually all major hi-tech U.S. companies have installations in Israel, either manufacturing plants or research laboratories or both. Such companies as IBM, Digital Equipment, Intel, National Semiconductor, Motorola and many others have established plants in the industrial parks mushrooming around the country’s academic institutions.

Israel’s economy is vibrant and growing, and offers countless investment opportunities in industry, agriculture, real estate, tourism, commerce, science and medical R&D, and much more. The opportunities that abound for domestic and foreign investors are almost limitless. What this small country has accomplished in just 60 years and against all odds is truly amazing. The emerging nations and “third world countries” should take the economy of Israel as an example and attempt to emulate it.

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off the systemic risk that might arise from a disorderly collapse. The deal was announced on a Sunday night after a weekend of frantic negotiations. Morgan was to acquire Bear for a price of \$2 per share—Bear’s stock having closed Friday at \$30. The Fed made a \$30 billion loan to Morgan to buy Bear’s portfolio of illiquid mortgage-backed securities, which came with a guarantee that the Fed would take the lion’s share of any losses.

A key problem in the Bear deal was the price. As soon as the deal was announced at \$2 per share, stockholders began protesting that they could probably recover more in bankruptcy. But bankruptcy was something the Fed couldn’t allow to happen because of the systemic risks involved—it simply had to find an acquirer for Bear, and the low price made Morgan a very willing acquirer indeed. In other words, for the sake of the overall financial system, the Fed decided to sacrifice the interests of Bear shareholders to the interests of Morgan shareholders. Ultimately, under the threat of litigation, the deal got renegotiated at \$10—evidence that \$2 had been far too low.

The Fed had rationalized the initial price with a “moral hazard” argument. The market, it reasoned, must be taught that a bank couldn’t expect the Fed to bail it out after it had taken undue risks. It’s hard to fault the sense of rough justice underlying that conclusion. But its unintended consequences would prove, in the end, to be extremely harmful—as is often the case when governments meddle in markets. The Fed, which was created almost 100 years ago specifically to save banks that get in trouble, had with Bear Stearns accidentally created an incentive structure to destroy banks.

When the Fed sets the precedent that it will, on a weekend when normal market processes aren’t available, hand over a troubled bank to a competitor at a price well below its market value—below even its value in bankruptcy—there’s no incentive to remain a shareholder at all. Long-term shareholders, who ought to be incentivized to stick with banks that run into difficulty, instead receive the message that they should flee at the first sign of trouble lest they be wiped out by the “rescue.” Stronger banks, sovereign-wealth funds, and other private investors that might profitably help a troubled bank by investing in it learn instead to wait for trouble to boil over into crisis, at which time the Fed will practically give the bank away on a Sunday night.

What’s worse, speculators get the message that they can push banks over the brink by shorting their stocks and spreading rumors, driving share prices so low that it becomes prohibitively costly to raise new capital—assuming anyone would dare invest new capital—and the Fed or some other regulator then has no choice but to step in and put them out of their misery. Such speculative attacks work on any bank the government deems “systemically important”—the new way of saying “too big to fail.”

FALLING ONE BY ONE

By creating a perverse incentive system that punished shareholder loyalty and courageous new investments while rewarding mischievous short sellers and rumormongers, the Fed created a situation in which any firm “too big to fail” suddenly became too big *not* to fail. Banks and other financial companies were beset by speculators, abandoned by their shareholders, and rendered unable to raise new capital, until some combination of the Fed,

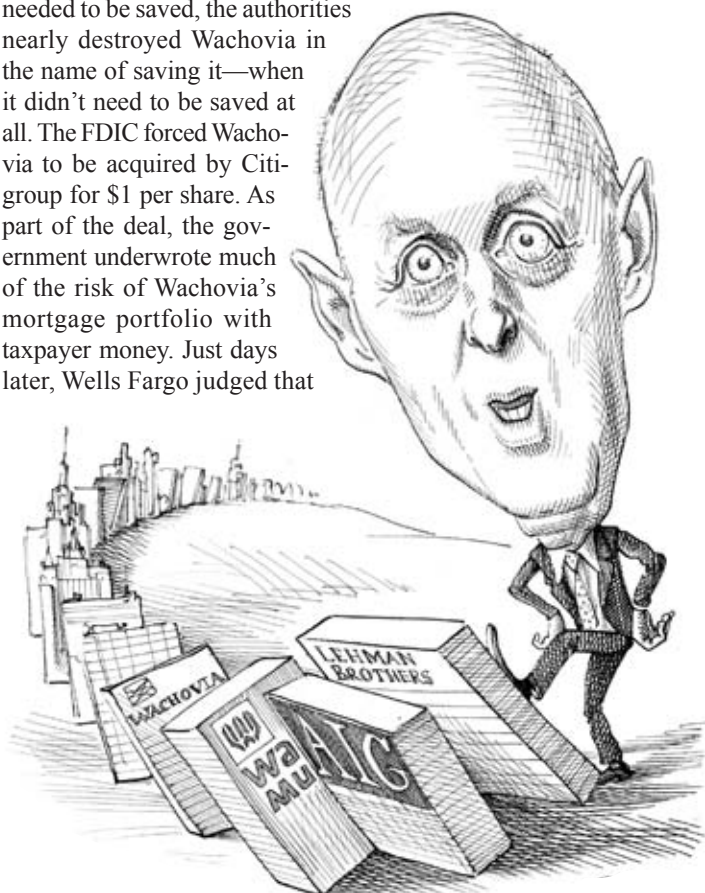
the Treasury, and the FDIC euthanized them. One by one they fell: Fannie, Freddie, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, AIG, Washington Mutual, and Wachovia.

Consider Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. In mid-July, Congress rushed legislation to passage that gave Paulson authority to rescue the two troubled mortgage firms. He told Congress the authority would be like “a bazooka,” and that simply having it meant he probably wouldn’t have to use it. Three weeks later he used it. On the weekend of September 6–7, Paulson threw Fannie and Freddie into “conservatorship”—which is to say, Treasury took them over—wiping out what the day before had been \$30 billion in shareholder wealth while making a few short sellers very wealthy.

Why did Paulson use his bazooka after all, and why on that weekend? The reason leaked to the press was that an expert forensic-accounting team had been poring over the GSEs’ books and was shocked to discover accounting irregularities; in fact, they had discovered nothing that hadn’t already been discussed in great detail in the financial press.

Over the weekend of September 13–14, the Fed and the Treasury found they couldn’t arrange a private-sector rescue of Lehman Brothers, so the venerable investment bank was allowed to fail. Its failure set in motion destabilizing systemic consequences in global markets, including the failure of money-market funds that held Lehman’s debt—precisely the consequences the authorities had said it was essential to avoid in the case of Bear Stearns. Those consequences will be felt for years to come as they play out in bankruptcy courts in jurisdictions around the world.

Two weekends later, having failed to save Lehman, a bank that needed to be saved, the authorities nearly destroyed Wachovia in the name of saving it—when it didn’t need to be saved at all. The FDIC forced Wachovia to be acquired by Citigroup for \$1 per share. As part of the deal, the government underwrote much of the risk of Wachovia’s mortgage portfolio with taxpayer money. Just days later, Wells Fargo judged that



Wachovia was still very much a going concern and offered to pay \$9 a share for it, without asking for government guarantees. Wachovia shareholders and taxpayers should be delighted. Citigroup, claiming it had exclusive rights to negotiate a deal, is suing.

So why was Lehman allowed to fail? Statements from the Fed at the time suggest a belief—now, it seems, quite mistaken—that the system could survive its failure. More recently, Fed chairman Ben Bernanke has said that the Fed lacked the legal authority to do what would have been necessary to rescue Lehman. But that rings false, given that the constraints of legal authority were an early casualty of the credit crisis. For example, the Bear Stearns rescue hinged on the \$30 billion “loan” to Morgan for Bear’s mortgage portfolio, but it wasn’t a loan at all—it was an outright acquisition, and it is far from clear that the Fed has any legal authority to acquire busted mortgage-backed securities. The Fed does have the authority to make loans, so the acquisition was disguised as a loan with the help of clever lawyers.

The authority for the Fed’s acquisition of a controlling interest in AIG—again, dressed up as a loan—is even more dubious. The Treasury put up the money to fund the Fed’s \$85 billion injection into AIG—which has now swollen to \$120 billion. The Fed was simply a convenient conduit for something Treasury wanted to do but would have needed congressional approval to execute directly. As an independent agency with broad and hazily defined powers, the Fed was better positioned than Treasury to put its signature on the deal. As for the Fed’s independence—a cornerstone of its credibility as the most important and prestigious central bank in the world—its complicity with Treasury in the rogue AIG operation pretty much puts an end to that myth.

URGENCY, THEN INACTION

As each domino fell, the panic deepened and made it more likely that the next domino would tumble. Paulson and Bernanke sought to get matters under control with a massive and unified display of power—shock and awe, if you will—and thereby was born TARP: the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program.

Paulson spent two weeks convincing Congress and the American people that, unless he was immediately granted nearly unbounded power to throw \$700 billion at the problem he himself had done so much to create, the nation would enter a depression. At the end of the two weeks—on October 3—he got his wish. The moment President Bush inked his signature on the legislation authorizing TARP, Paulson should have announced that Treasury was buying hundreds of billions of dollars of troubled assets, in trades arranged over the previous two weeks. Instead, having stressed how urgent it was to act quickly, he did nothing.

Or next to nothing. Paulson put out a press release saying that Treasury, the Fed, the FDIC, and the SEC would have a meeting to decide what to do. And the Treasury website posted “procurement guidelines” for private-sector vendors seeking to work with Treasury on TARP.

The SEC put out a press release too. Having three weeks before enacted a provisional ban on short-selling—to halt the speculative attacks incentivized by the string of botched

rescues—the commission announced that with the passage of TARP the ban would be lifted. Only an SEC lawyer could believe that the mere passage of a law giving Treasury authority to act would hold the avalanche of short-selling at bay.

Between Paulson’s inaction and the SEC’s ineptitude, the S&P 500 lost about 20 percent of its value in the week following the enactment of TARP. Why, Paulson must have wondered, didn’t they greet us as liberators? It was time for yet more improvisation, once more on a weekend.

But this time Paulson got it right: Gone was the idea of buying troubled assets. Over the weekend of October 11–12, Paulson met with the CEOs of the nine largest and most powerful U.S. banks. Apparently he got very tough with them: He locked them in a room, reports said, and forced them to accept \$125 billion in capital investments from the Treasury, with another \$125 billion to go to smaller banks later. One has to suspect that this was a cover story, sleight-of-hand to distract attention from the fact that Treasury’s investment was being made on the most generous terms imaginable. Consider that, three weeks apart, Treasury and Warren Buffett both made \$10 billion investments in nonvoting perpetual preferred stock of Goldman Sachs. The difference is that Goldman’s cost for Buffett’s capital is about 18 percent per annum over the next five years. Its cost with Paulson is only about 7 percent. The other banks all got the same sweet deal from Paulson that Goldman did.

It is disturbing that there is not a single word in the TARP legislation that authorizes a direct capital investment in a bank. There are “provisions related to film and television productions” and an “exemption from excise tax for certain wooden arrows designed for use by children.” But nothing about Treasury’s buying stock in a bank.

Legal questions aside, Treasury’s \$250 billion investment in U.S. banks marks an important turning point. For the first time in this saga, an institution that is supposed to rescue troubled banks is actually rescuing troubled banks—without wiping out shareholders in the process.

This is the way the authorities should have handled the credit crisis from the very beginning, from Bear Stearns onward. If we’re going to do bailouts at all, they should be real bailouts. And this one is.

This bailout is big, too, representing nearly 20 percent of total U.S. bank capital as reported by the FDIC. That \$250 billion in fresh capital effectively grants the banking system the staying power to ride out the storm in something like \$2.5 trillion in troubled assets, given that banks typically hold assets worth about ten times their capital. That’s enough to cover every single U.S. subprime and Alt-A mortgage that isn’t already owned or guaranteed by Freddie or Fannie, plus every single junk bond and leveraged bank loan in the world—with a couple hundred billion dollars left over. And that’s only \$250 billion of Paulson’s \$700 billion authority.

But then again Paulson, Bernanke, and all the rest have done a great deal of damage. And it’s not just in the banking system, and it’s not just in the U.S. The banking crisis has infected the real economy, turning a slowdown into a serious recession. And it’s a global phenomenon. We won’t get out of this mess quickly. But with Paulson finally doing the right thing, at least we can make a start.

NR

Reform School

Sarah Palin and the future of the GOP

RAMESH PONNURU

SARAH PALIN is by most accounts a capable woman, but it was hardly fair to ask her not only to raise five children, govern a state, and run for vice president but also to carry all the symbolic freight of America's culture wars. Yet it has been her fate in this election to become a symbol of everything that some people like, and some people dislike, about our red states.

She was almost certainly not chosen for the purpose of inflaming our cultural divisions. Doubtless Senator McCain thought of her as a fellow reformer and crusader against Republican corruption, the most popular governor in the country, and a fresh female face. Her being pro-life made it possible for him to pick her without stirring up trouble within the party. But he does not seem to have had any design to elevate the social issues within the campaign, and indeed neither McCain nor Palin has done much to contrast their positions on abortion and marriage with those of the Democrats.

Within hours of the announcement of her selection, however, she had inspired something that seemed closer to a brawl than a debate. One side criticized not only her record and positions but her intellect, her accent, even her fitness as a mother. The other saw the attacks on her as vicious snobbery. In retrospect, we can see that the sudden rise of the most prominent pro-life woman ever to play a major role in American politics would provoke a kind of hysteria among liberals and a defensive reaction among conservatives. But much of the partisan anger her nomination has provoked will subside after the election, particularly if McCain and Palin go down to defeat.

WHAT WILL CONSERVATISM CONSERVE?

The intra-conservative debate about Palin will, however, go on, because it has gotten mixed up with a broader argument about conservatism's future. She may run for president herself in 2012. But whether or not she runs, she is becoming a symbol of what some conservatives want to change about their movement and others to preserve.

In a recent broadcast, Rush Limbaugh ripped into several conservatives who have made negative comments about Palin. He mentioned David Frum, David Brooks, Peggy Noonan, Kathleen Parker, and Christopher Buckley—the last of whom cited the selection of Palin as one of his reasons for supporting Barack Obama this fall. Said Limbaugh: “They’ve got this new idea of what conservatism ought to be and they’re trying to redefine it. This is the crowd saying the era of Reagan is over. These are the people who are embarrassed by Sarah Palin ’cause she’s not an intellectual and she didn’t go to Harvard or have a college degree from approved universities and she drops her G’s from words like morning and says mornin’.”

A little later Limbaugh added that some conservatives “think the Republican party has lost the Wal-Mart class because we don’t care enough,” and therefore want to “redistribute wealth, but smarter and better.” He closed his argument by quoting *Washington Times* columnist Tony Blankley, who had criticized the anti-Palin conservatives the same day. Blankley called these “me-too conservatives” the heirs of the failed Republicans of the New Deal era, who “supported, rather than opposed, Democratic party policies but claimed they would administer them better. Of course, this led to a half-century of Democratic dominance of American government and politics.”

While Limbaugh and Blankley are both typically shrewd observers of the political scene, they are of course offering a critic’s view of a school of thought rather than presenting that school in its own terms. It is true that there is a small and very loosely affiliated group of conservative writers that aims, if not to “redefine” conservatism, at least to rethink what it means in practical terms today. Its members include youngish writers such as Ross Douthat, Reihan Salam, Yuval Levin, Robert Stein, and me, but also such older figures as Brooks and Frum. I will call us, for convenience, reformist conservatives. (I do not mean to stack the deck with that label: “Reform” can be for good or ill, as conservatives well know.)

These people disagree with one another too much to be described as a movement within the conservative movement. But a few points of commonality can be discerned. All of us believe that the conservative program should be updated to apply longstanding principles to contemporary circumstances. All of us think that cracking down on earmarks, drilling, and preserving the Bush tax cuts are insufficient as a conservative domestic agenda, and that excessive spending is not the principal reason Republicans have been doing badly. Many of us believe that Republicans have suffered electoral defeats not because they have failed to demonstrate sufficient compassion for lower-middle-class voters but because they have failed to show how conservative policies can benefit those voters.

Some of us have suggested that we need a post-Reaganite conservatism. Couching the matter in those terms is tactically foolish, since it alienates conservatives who rightly revere Reagan’s memory, but it is also misleading. Most of us wish not to jettison Reaganite principles but to adapt them to the challenges of the moment, which is, after all, precisely what Reagan himself did. He became a political star speaking in support of Barry Goldwater’s 1964 campaign. But it’s not as though he ran on the Goldwater program in 1980.

So, for example, Stein and I have suggested that lowering the top income-tax rate is less urgent now that it is 35 percent than it was in 1980, when it was 70 percent, and that other types of tax cuts should move higher on conservatives’ list of priorities.

One can agree or disagree with these ideas, or reserve judgment until they have been developed further. But it would be a mistake to view the debate over these ideas as a referendum on Governor Palin. For one thing, most of her conservative critics are not participants in the debate over updating and reforming conservatism. Kathleen Parker rarely writes about policy issues at all. Christopher Buckley has never sought to exert influence over conservatives. I get the impression from Peggy Noonan’s columns that she believes that what Republicans most need to do is to return to their pre-Bush small-government roots. The reformist Douthat, meanwhile, has been among the most stalwart defenders of Palin against unfair attacks.

Moreover, Palin herself is hardly an old-school conservative. On the stump she has said that she would support new government programs along the lines of Title IX if they are needed to achieve workplace equality for women. She has flayed corporate greed as a culprit for the financial meltdown. She has endorsed a partial amnesty for illegal immigrants. (Some of Palin's conservative fans say that all of these views were adopted for McCain's benefit rather than sincerely, but they have presented no evidence for that theory.) On these issues it is Palin, not the reformists, who deserves the me-too tag.

The impression that the reformists are hostile to Palin is largely the result of Brooks and Frum, who have indeed been harsh critics—although Brooks, to his credit, has attacked the snobbery to which she has been subjected.

PALIN AS SCAPEGOAT

Governor Palin would not have been my first, second, or even third choice for vice-presidential nominee, largely because she has had so little experience in dealing with national policy issues. Criticism of her on that score seems not only fair but right. Some of her conservative defenders, in understandable fury at the deranged assault on her character, have suggested that owning guns is more important than knowing about government policy. That type of anti-intellectualism should be resisted.

But when Brooks said, admittedly in off-the-cuff remarks, that Palin herself represented an anti-intellectualism that was a "fatal cancer" on the Republican party, and suggested that Obama's familiarity with the works of Reinhold Niebuhr was some sort of qualification for the presidency, he made the opposite mistake. Frum, meanwhile, has posted several of his readers' comments approving his anti-Palin remarks—in which they take shots at the stupidity of heartland conservatives in general and evangelicals in particular—without a word of dissent.

The intra-conservative controversy over Palin does not split reformists from other conservatives. But it does point to a division among the reformists themselves, particularly in their attitude toward rank-and-file conservative voters. The reformists have sometimes been caricatured as East Coast elitists. But the political figures for whom Brooks, Douthat, and Salam have had the most praise have been Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee.

Any sensible politics includes an important role for elites. Developing policies and strategies is necessarily an elite pursuit. James Burnham wrote long ago that popular rule is a misleading slogan masking, at best, a popular choice among rival elites. But a reformist conservatism that treats the base of the Republican party with contempt will not succeed or deserve to.

Reformist conservatives sometimes say that they want to remake the Republican party the way the Democratic Leadership Council and

Bill Clinton remade their party in 1992. It is worth recalling that Clinton's innovations were not, in the main, resisted by Democratic voters. Rank-and-file Democrats were not enthusiastic about an unreformed welfare system or the black-on-white violence that Sister Souljah celebrated. It was party elites that the Clintonites most needed to change.

If reformist conservatism is to be a practical politics, it is going to need to have some idea of which voters it should be most intent on courting. There are, of course, upper-middle-class voters who are free-traders but appalled by conservatives' indifference to high culture and uncomfortable with evangelical Christianity, and Republicans can use as many of their votes as they can get. But their most fruitful hunting grounds are likely to be among lower-middle-class voters who are moderately socially conservative but economically anxious. Those voters are unlikely to be interested in any sort of conservatism, reformist or otherwise, that does not forthrightly reject snobbery. They might be interested in a conservatism that addressed their concerns—particularly if it were voiced by a candidate, such as Governor Palin, who comes from a working-class background and in important ways has not left it.

If McCain loses, it will not be because of Palin, and people who prefer Obama to McCain because they object to her are not reasoning intelligently. The arguments over Palin do, however, hold a warning for conservatives, and it is not the one some reformists have in mind. If reform conservatism is defined as an anti-populist, anti-social-conservative venture, it will fail. **NR**



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‘The World is My Constituency’

Are liberals rejecting the liberal-internationalist tradition?

JOHN FONTE

‘WE are the party of Roosevelt. We are the party of Kennedy,” declared Barack Obama in accepting the Democratic nomination. Is that still true? Peter Beinart analyzed the liberal-internationalist tradition in the summer issue of *World Affairs*, arguing that Wilson and FDR’s optimistic vision of liberal internationalism, grounded in collective security and collective peace, confronts a rival Republican vision that he correctly describes as “conservative internationalism” rather than isolationism. The Republican internationalist tradition, from Henry Cabot Lodge to Reagan to McCain (as opposed to the more anti-interventionist Borah-Taft-Paul school), sees the world as a dangerous place. It is less optimistic about human nature and focused more on military alliances than on international institutions, Beinart tells us. Fair enough.

The problem with Obama’s oratory and Beinart’s thesis is that the traditional framework of liberal internationalism is dying. Liberal internationalism is first of all *inter-national*, concerned with relations between sovereign nation-states. As practiced by Wilson, FDR, and Truman, liberal internationalism meant American leadership while working with other nations in alliances and in creating new international organizations to promote peace and collective security, such as the United Nations. While they were unquestionably internationalists, those Democrats were also nationalists, pursuing American interests and willing to use force to secure them. While they were mostly Wilsonians, to borrow Walter Russell Mead’s formulation, they were also quite willing to employ Hamiltonian (which is to say, economic) and defense-oriented Jacksonian means. Mead specifically mentions the World War II bombing of Japanese and German cities as a Jacksonian turn. In sum, they were national progressives, not transnational progressives.

Today, in the major precincts of mainstream American liberalism, the merely international is *passé*; the transnational, or global, is ascendant. As John Ruggie of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government puts it, “Postwar institutions including the United Nations were built for an *inter-national* world, but we have entered a *global* world. International institutions were designed to reduce *external* friction, between states; our challenge today is to devise more *inclusive* forms of global governance.”

Mr. Fonte is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. His book *Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or be Ruled by Others?* will be published by Encounter next year.

Typical of leading law-school opinion is a comment in May 2008 by the dean of Georgetown University Law School, Alexander Aleinikoff, who was general counsel of the immigration service under Clinton. Aleinikoff envisions new transnational political authorities above and beyond American constitutional democracy. He writes that we should expect the “development and strengthening of other political institutions—regional, transnational, some global . . . exercising what will be perceived as legitimate legal and coercive authority. . . . That is, a decline in citizenship in the nation-state is likely to be accompanied by new kinds of citizenships associated with ‘polities’ that tax and spend, organize armies and police, establish courts, and promulgate what are perceived to be binding norms. There is no reason that standard accounts of citizenship that link governance and a people cannot be stated at the appropriate level of abstraction to apply to new forms of political association.” Aleinikoff’s account may be read as both predictive and normative, an indication that American elites not only believe that our constitutional democracy will be subordinated to global authorities but also desire that this come to pass.

To what extent would an Obama victory mean the replacement of traditional liberal internationalism with transnational progressivism? To be sure, the liberal internationalists are still with us. They include writers such as Beinart, John Patrick Diggins, and Michael Lind, the venerable political scientist Robert Dahl, such foreign-policy practitioners as Richard Holbrooke and Michael O’Hanlon, and even some younger policy wonks at the Center for New American Security who describe themselves as “Truman Democrats.” But it is possible that Hillary Clinton’s campaign was the last hurrah of liberal internationalism. *The Nation* noted that Obama’s advisers “tend to be younger, more progressive . . . more likely to stress ‘soft power’ issues like human rights.” But it’s not the big names that we should watch; rather, we should keep in mind the observation of Gaetano Mosca, the political theorist who argued that an understanding of modern government does not begin with cabinet members (prediction: Lugar at State) but with the second stratum of appointees: the undersecretaries and the deputy assistant secretaries. It is very likely that this lower layer of Obama lieutenants would have internalized the transnational progressives’ positions on global governance, international law, shared sovereignty, international norms, and the like.

This would likely have two outcomes: first, a high-profile push to ratify a series of treaties that have been languishing for years; second, a less publicized but equally important initiative to transform (specifically to transnationalize and lawyerize) America’s security-defense establishment.

‘LEADERSHIP’ REDEFINED

In the name of “rejoining the international community” and exercising world leadership, an Obama administration would probably attempt to ratify some U.N. treaties that directly challenge American sovereignty, including the Law of the Sea Treaty, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the International Criminal Court. Tactically, Obama would probably start with the easier treaties, the Law of the Sea and the Rights of the Child. He could argue that both the current leadership of the

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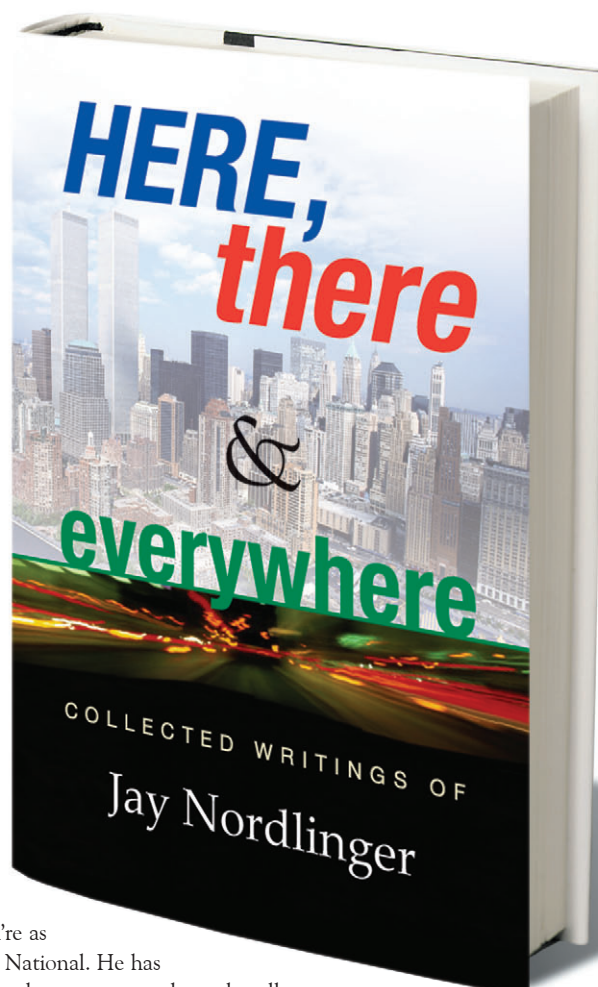
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U.S. Navy and the Bush administration have supported the Law of the Sea Treaty, and that only the U.S. and Somalia have declined to ratify the Rights of the Child. Joe Biden, with his experience as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, would be the perfect point man on U.N. treaty issues, demanding of opponents: "Don't you trust the Navy? Do you want to stand alone with Somalia?"

The Law of the Sea Treaty raises serious national-security concerns. It could subject maritime disputes involving U.S. defense forces to mandatory arbitration by an international tribunal in Hamburg composed of 21 judges, some chosen by the likes of Burma, China, Cuba, and Russia. The former commander of the Pacific Fleet, retired admiral James "Ace" Lyons, said it would be "inconceivable" to "forfeit . . . America's freedom of the seas" to an "unaccountable international agency."

The Rights of the Child Treaty is at odds with the U.S. Constitution. If adopted, it would nullify federalism by requiring uniform penal codes for minors across all 50 states, meaning that Texas and Vermont would have to adopt identical laws governing juvenile offenders. It would abolish the death penalty and life imprisonment under all circumstances for those under 18 and severely curtail parental rights—for example, children would have a legal right to "correspondence" with anyone on the planet without "interference" from their parents. Whatever the particular merits of these issues, Americans should be able to decide for themselves how to raise their children or punish criminals.

CEDAW, the women's-rights treaty, would almost certainly resurface under Obama. Joe Biden led the successful fight in 2002 to get CEDAW out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which he chairs, but it was not brought to the Senate floor because it lacked the necessary 67 votes to pass. Biden argued at the time that the U.S., in positioning itself as a champion of women's rights in the Middle East and across the globe, was morally obliged to ratify the treaty. But in order for the U.S. to be in full compliance with CEDAW, Americans would have to alter our constitutional system, repudiate federalism, and allow U.N. treaty requirements to dictate domestic policies.

Testifying against CEDAW before the Senate, civil-rights lawyer Kathryn Balmforth stated that the U.N. committee monitoring compliance with the treaty "seems oblivious to political self-determination and freely chosen democratic leadership." For example, she noted, the U.N. experts have called for sex-based preferences "in all spheres, public and private, and even for elective offices." CEDAW monitors called on Georgia to return to its Communist-era gender quotas in political offices. Britain has been told to adopt the standard of equal pay for work of "comparable value," as determined by bureaucrats. CEDAW monitors are also concerned that British men are not taking parental leave at the same rate as British women. This might be humorous if it were not for the fact that the American Bar Association and various human-rights lawyers already are planning to use CEDAW to overturn a vast array of federal and state laws that they do not have the votes to defeat through democratic means.

More than any other treaty organization, the International Criminal Court is central to the global-governance project.

A key Obama foreign-policy adviser, Sarah Sewall of Harvard's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, is an expert on the ICC. She has co-edited a book, funded by the MacArthur Foundation, recommending that the U.S. join the court. She writes: "The ICC represents an acid test of America's commitment to *international* and *universal* concepts of justice and human rights—its willingness to be bound by the rules it establishes for others." She and co-author Carl Kaysen argue that critics of this transnational court have an outdated conception of sovereignty and that "we have chosen to stand with rogue states in opposition to fundamental norms of international justice."

The U.S. government opposes the ICC because American soldiers could be charged with war crimes and made subject to the court's final jurisdiction by a decision of the ICC's pre-trial chamber, which would supercede our Constitution. Moreover, even though the U.S. is not a party to the treaty, if an alleged "war crime" occurs within a state that has joined the treaty (e.g., Afghanistan), Americans could be prosecuted. To guard against this possibility, Congress passed the American Service Members Protection Act, authorizing military action in the event of such an occurrence. In sum, the ICC is a transnational authority that directly challenges American self-government under the Constitution.

McCain hasn't been a pillar of reliability on this issue, either. In January 2008, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported his comments on the ICC as follows: "I want us in the ICC, but I'm not satisfied that there are enough safeguards." Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, McCain adviser Robert Kagan argues that America has "little to fear" from increased transnational authority and "should not oppose but welcome a world of pooled and diminished national sovereignty." Kagan has it wrong here; diminishing our sovereignty is at odds with American constitutional democracy, and is, of course, a political loser for McCain.

McCain should forthrightly oppose the ICC and other transnational power grabs. He could say: "We support democratic self-government and oppose the ICC because it claims jurisdiction over the citizens of democratic, sovereign states without the consent of the citizens of those states. This means that, besides being concerned with its own interests and citizens, the United States will support the self-government and interests of other democratic states that have not ratified the ICC, including Israel, India, the Czech Republic, and Chile, on the universal grounds of democratic sovereignty."

LAWYERIZING WAR

An Obama administration would seek to transform the culture and ethos of America's soldiers. They would say, "We need to globalize thinking and develop new understandings of the role of international law," which would appear reasonable enough. The subtext, however, would be a call to transnationalize and lawyerize America's security in general and the American military in particular.

To see the future, one should examine the activities of Harvard's Carr Center under the leadership of Sewall (and another prominent Obama supporter, Samantha Power). For years, it has conducted workshops on the crossroads of military

doctrine, international law, and human rights. Participants have included former and current high-ranking military officers (Wesley Clark), NGO leaders from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (Kenneth Roth), international lawyers, academics, journalists, and activists.

In theory the workshops are for informational purposes. In practice they amount to a political campaign to soften opposition to the International Criminal Court (and transnational law generally) and to ensure that Amnesty International's human-rights perspective becomes that of the American defense establishment. With Obama appointees at the top of the national-security agencies, we could expect an effort to transform what would be characterized as an outmoded, insular military culture.

Sewall gained foreign-policy credibility by participating in General Petraeus's project to develop a new counterinsurgency doctrine. But she declared in a revealing *Washington Post* article that "Petraeus may provide the ultimate service to the troops and the nation—and seal his legacy—not by winning, but by speaking the truth about Iraq." That truth, she said, was "the likelihood of failure." She wrote a 2008 paper arguing that American national interests represent a "transitional phase" that will ultimately be subordinate to a transnational system.

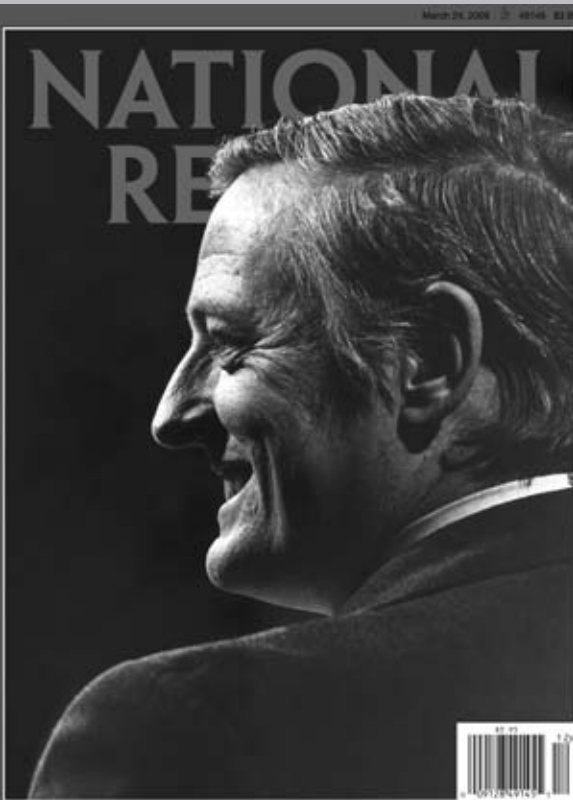
AMERICAN IDENTITY

All indications are that an Obama administration will move beyond traditional liberal internationalism of the Wilson-FDR-JFK variety to transnationalism. Ultimately this means that the evolving norms of international law would trump the U.S. Constitution.

A Harris poll taken for the Bradley Project on America's National Identity (I participated in the project) asked: "When there is a conflict between the U.S. Constitution and international law, which one should be the highest legal authority for Americans?" Sixty-six percent of registered voters preferred the Constitution, 16 percent put international law first, and 17 percent were undecided. The same Harris poll asked: "Do you think of yourself more as a citizen of the U.S. or a citizen of the world?" The result among registered voters: 83 percent American citizens, 12 percent global citizens, 4 percent not sure.

John McCain should clarify the differences between his views on America's role in the world and his opponent's ambiguity on global governance. Although the hour is late, he or a future Congress could stand with the overwhelming majority of the American people by articulating a strong case for constitutional democratic sovereignty. But whether debated in this election or not, the transnational challenge is not going away. **NR**

The Buckley Memorial Issue



The special 76-page issue includes reflections, essays, and remembrances from Henry Kissinger, Rush Limbaugh, Christopher Buckley, Priscilla Buckley, Tom Wolfe, Mark Steyn, Rich Lowry, Alistair Horne, Garry Wills, Joe Lieberman, Paul Johnson, John O'Sullivan, Rick Brookhiser, Mona Charen, Ramesh Ponnuru, Jay Nordlinger, Jason Steorts, Ed Capano, William Rusher, Dan Oliver, Michael Kinsley, Charles Kesler, Roger Kimball, Peter Robinson, Taki Theodoracopulos, Kevin Fitzpatrick, Ira Glasser, Linda Bridges, Anthony Dick, Neal Freeman, Jeff Hart, and Danilo Petronovich. Supplies are limited.

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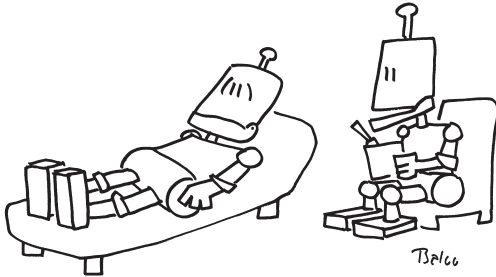
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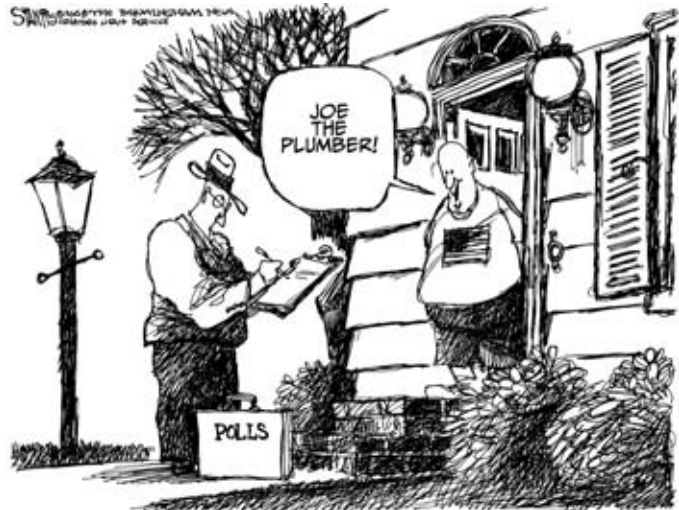


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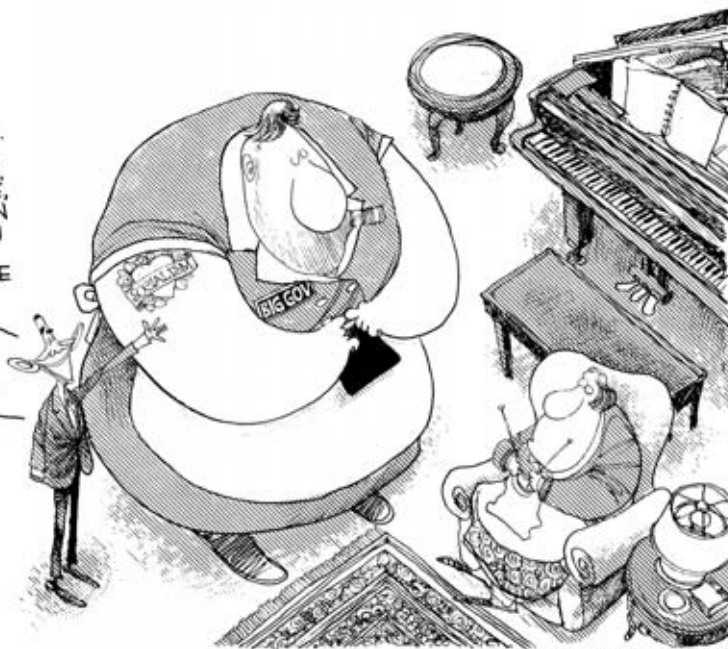
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— JAMES T. FENT, Gemologist*

Huge Ruby Found on Bali—Is It Yours?

Paradise is reflected in this magnificent 22 1/2 carat ruby...but the price is the most heavenly.

On the tropical island of Bali, the air is filled with ancient mystery and perpetual festivity. Who would have thought that our deep sea diving trip to this romantic paradise would lead us to a treasure of giant deep red rubies. This beautiful isle is so vivid and untouched it has become the spiritual inspiration for many an artist. Bali has gardens tripping down hillsides like giant steps, volcanoes soaring up through the clouds, long white sandy beaches, and friendly artisans who have a long history of masterful jewelry designs.

We stumbled upon a cache of giant natural rubies at a local artisan's workshop. He brought these exotic Burmese Rubies to Bali and now we have brought them home to you. Our necklace showcases a genuine **22 1/2 carat** facet cut ruby set in a frame of .925 sterling silver in the Balinese style. *That's right—22 1/2 carats!*

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a bezel of sterling silver and then wrapped with a twisted rope. The Oval Ruby Pendant measures approximately 1 1/4" by 1 1/2". This exotic pendant suspends from an 18" silver snake chain and secures with a spring ring clasp. Drape this pendant around your neck for a bold luxurious look. And, since rubies are rarer than diamonds, we hope your rings don't get jealous. Most likely, this will be the largest precious gemstone that you will ever own.

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the long view

ROB LONG

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the corner

Wednesday, November 5, 2008

It's a Wonderful Day [Rich Lowry]

Last night, I went to bed feeling a bit dejected. And yet this morning, upon waking, a sense of calm and peace has come over me. I feel reborn in a world guided and governed by a Wonderful Spirit. Truly, Master Obama lights our path.

[11/5 06:20 AM](#)

Re: It's a Wonderful Day

[Kathryn Lopez]

Um, Rich? Everything okay?

[11/5 06:25 AM](#)

Friends, Stop Fighting the Way

[Jay Nordlinger]

Rich, I'm so gratified to hear you say this. I, too, fell asleep last night in a state of profound disquiet. I think, upon reflection, that it was simply my own fear—fear of a New Way, fear of His Majesty—and my own weaknesses that clouded my vision. Now, this morning, the new sun streaming into my room, I'm suddenly free of this kind of Wrong Thinking. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to throw out this houseplant that arrived mysteriously at my door last night, and then I'm going to walk expressionlessly through the streets of Manhattan. Truly, Master Obama lights our path.

[11/5 06:29 AM](#)

Re: Friends, Stop Fighting the Way

[Kathryn Lopez]

Guys, if this is some kind of joke, it's not very funny. Our taxes are going up, we're leaving foreign policy in the hands of a novice at best or a clown at worst (Joe Biden). I mean, okay, okay, I get it: You're all doing a "Body Snatchers" thing. But maybe we can give the sci-fi stuff a rest. Are you with me, Jonah?

[11/5 06:33 AM](#)

Which One of You Guys Sent Me This Plant? [Jonah Goldberg]

Boy, that was a late night. Just got in, after filing a couple of columns on the election. I'm exhausted and heading to bed for a few

hours, after which I promise I'll get to the pile of e-mail I've got waiting. Thanks for the houseplant, whoever sent it. I'm going to set it right next to my bed for some reason, and then fall asleep.

[11/5 06:35 AM](#)

Re: Which One of You Guys Sent Me This Plant? [Kathryn Lopez]

Okay, look, this ISN'T funny anymore. Jonah, come on. There's lots to talk about today. Anyone?

[11/5 06:39 AM](#)

Kathryn, You Are Becoming Troublesome to Us [Rich Lowry]

Kathryn, why do you cling to your Old Self? Aren't you weary of your Wrong Thoughts? Truly, Master Obama lights our path. It's time to rest, Kathryn. Rest. Close your tired eyes. But first, move your houseplant closer to your head.

[11/5 06:45 AM](#)

K-Lo, Don't Do It!

[Mark Steyn]

Kathryn, I know I'm NRO's resident alarmist, but there's something happenin' here, and what it is, alas, is perfectly clear. My flinty New Hampshire neighbor stopped by this morning—this is a guy who rarely travels anywhere without a plaid hunting jacket and a collection of firearms; in other words, as far as Obama is concerned, he's Corporal Clinger, to guns, God, and everything else—and he had changed. He was all glassy-eyed and Obamarama'd, muttering something about a New Day and how Master Obama lights our path, or something.

And he was carrying a houseplant. For me. A gift.

So Lowry and Nordlinger, I'm fairly certain, have become pod people. They've been snatched. Whatever you do, don't fall asleep. And toss out the houseplant. (Conservatives shouldn't even have houseplants. Awful green things.)

We'll get through this, K-Lo. Just be vigilant. More later.

[11/5 06:55 AM](#)



Re: K-Lo, Don't Do It!

[Mark Hemingway]

Mark, why do you resist so hard? Can't you see that all resistance is futile? The New Day is already here. Truly, Master Obama lights our path.

[11/5 06:56 AM](#)

Re: K-Lo, Don't Do It! [David Freddoso]

Master Obama lights our path.

[11/5 06:57 AM](#)

Re: K-Lo, Don't Do It!

[Ramesh Ponnuru]

Master Obama lights our path.

[11/5 06:58 AM](#)

Re: K-Lo, Don't Do It! [Mark Levin]

Master Obama lights our path.

[11/5 06:59 AM](#)

Re: K-Lo, Don't Do It!

[Jonah Goldberg]

Just woke up from the greatest nap. Can't find the plant, though.

Oh, and K-Lo? Truly Master Obama lights our path.

It's time, Kathryn.

[11/5 07:00 AM](#)

Okay, This Is Officially Weird Now

[Kathryn Lopez]

I'm getting calls and e-mails from people all over the place. Mitt Romney just called me to tell me that after sleeping on it last night, he's come to realize that President Obama has our best interests at heart. That he's The One. That he lights our path.

I hear a lot of muttering and scuffling outside my office door here at NR HQ. People keep trying the knob—I locked the door a while ago—and I hear them scratching to get in.

Is anybody out there?

[11/5 07:01 AM](#)

The K-Lowdown. [Mark Steyn]

Sorry to be the Bad News Bearer, K-Lo, but I have to say that after a short power nap, I've come to two conclusions: 1) I actually do like houseplants; and 2) Master Obama lights our path.

Turn out the lights in your office, dear, and take a snooze.

[11/5 07:05 AM](#)

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Jeff Life, MD,
pictured at age 67.
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the bent pin

FLORENCE KING

A Broad at Home

'SHINE, perishing republic," as Robinson Jeffers said when I voted him the poet I would most like to have a beer with.

As I write this in the waning days before the election, Campaign '08 has been buffed up to reveal a high gloss of protesting too much that meets Shakespearean standards for compulsive self-exposure. Listening to endless choked-up tributes to the "real people," the "real patriots," and the "real Americans," you start to ask yourself, Why are they coming down so hard on the *real*? Are all those real people out there in the real America really as real as the pols say?

I got myself into this knotty speculation the same week that the subject of socialism hit the fan and became the bee in every bonnet, so I let it buzz around in mine until I came up with a theory.

Conservatives are incensed by the idea of American socialism but I think we have skipped it in favor of bigger and better despair. America will never be a socialist country per se because we are already globalists-in-training and will be full-fledged ones in the not-too-distant future. At the moment, we are undergoing some kind of 21st-century sociopolitical sea change, comparable to the transference stage in psychoanalysis that leaves people the same, but different.

Globalism is socialism without borders whereby the world's moneymen practice unfettered capitalism among themselves while majority populations, lulled into brain death by the good life under the socialistic governments set up to keep them quiet, convince themselves that they live in capitalist countries. Not only do they get the "capitalist" part wrong, they get the "country" part wrong,

too. Globalist Man doesn't live in a country, he lives in what Teddy Roosevelt called a "polyglot boardinghouse." This is how socialism and globalism differ. Socialism leaves conspicuous nationality alone, often because it's good for the tourist trade. Globalism, on the other hand, cannot succeed unless people become foreigners in their own land. This is what is happening to "real" Americans in "real" America: Expatriation *in situ* is the enemy within, and it's us.

As the globalistas well know, displaced nations can survive intact without their art, without their music, even without their language, but they can't

survive without their hang-ups. Where you find hang-ups, there you will find strength of character: Well-adjusted people are push-

overs. Take away the hang-up and you take away the Americaness.

The winning formula can be expressed with: "Give me a hang-up until I am seven and it is mine forever." Unfortunately, in America it is virtually impossible to hold on to any trait smacking of individualism until the age of seven. Thanks to the combined forces of "education," political correctness, diversity, and free-floating induced guilt, we are losing so many of our hang-ups that we could be the poster child for Idiosyncrasy Makes the Man, Inc.

Our most famous lost hang-up was once the linchpin of our national identity. Called the American Standard of Living, it was the coin of the realm when H. L. Mencken wrote, "I'd trade the whole Acropolis for one American bathroom."

This provoked gales of scornful laughter from Europeans, especially the French, but it gave us the big three P's—philistine, provincial, puritanical—that defined us and told us exactly who we were. Mencken's sentence was easy to tweak to suit individual tastes, so if the Acropolis didn't turn you on you could trade the contents of the Louvre, the castles in Spain, or the undrained streets of Venice and still come out ahead because we were the Clean People, inside and

out, and the rest of the world were "dirty little foreigners."

The great American bathroom has fallen upon hard times, cast as a wasteful villain and refitted with low-flow everything. It will only get worse as the ecology movement gains strength. Greenies run to masochists, so it's only a matter of time before they launch a campaign to bring back the chamber pot and slop jar to save water.

The American Standard of Living had its moments in Campaign '08. Sarah Palin made hay with the three P's, but the real winner was Mencken's view of bathrooms versus artworks. Joe the Plumber became an overnight demigod not because of taxes, but because in the American subconscious mind, a plumber is still our Michelangelo.

We the Clean People are now "dirty little Americans," recoiling with inchoate resentment when we see the empty grocery-store shelves after the latest food recall. People whose parents told don't-drink-the-water jokes about their European travels now drink bottled water while earnestly holding forth on the dangers of drinking from their own taps. We are learning to discriminate against ourselves.

The hang-up we have always been proudest of is Yankee Ingenuity, but it met its nemesis in Hurricane Katrina and her moronic handmaiden, FEMA. Between the two of them they flattened our self-image of lightning-fast resourcefulness beyond repair. We will never arrive in the nick of time again, never be firstus'-with-the-mostus' again. The cavalry will charge in the wrong direction, the Red Cross will get the blood mixed up, refugees will go mad from the heat coming out of the air conditioners, and my grandmother's ghost will assume that it's all happening in the country she called, collectively, "South America" and start running down "those excitable foreigners."

Expatriation *in situ* is a fact. We are turning into our own foreigners, and it's not pleasant to witness. The flag pin has become a fetish, the feral grunts of "USA!" at rallies sound like trapped animals, and we have upgraded the male-on-male hug to include cheek-to-cheek bumping and kissing the air like "real" Frenchmen.

NR

Florence King can be reached at P.O. Box 7113, Fredericksburg, VA 22404.

Days of Iron



*“There Is No Alternative”:
Why Margaret Thatcher Matters,
by Claire Berlinski
(Basic, 386 pp., \$27.95)*

PETER ROBINSON

EVEN now as a frail old lady, Margaret Hilda Thatcher, the Rt. Hon. the Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven, elicits among intelligent people reactions that run from reverence to loathing. In this new book, Claire Berlinski asks, simply, How can this be? Only a child when Thatcher became prime minister, Berlinski sets out to learn the answer, reading up on British history, performing research in the Thatcher archives—presented with one of the former prime minister’s handbags, Berlinski is astounded to find that it smells of perfume, not “napalm and gunpowder”—and conducting long, pointed interviews with people who knew Thatcher well, including Bernard Ingham, her longtime press secretary, who still adores her, and Neil

A former speechwriter for President Reagan, Mr. Robinson is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, and host of Hoover’s vidcast program, *Uncommon Knowledge*, which appears on NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE.

Kinnock, former leader of the Labour party, who still detests her. The result is a very fine volume—brisk, engrossing, insightful, often charming, and almost always rigorous.

Almost? Almost. We will come back to this.

Berlinski starts in just the right way, demonstrating that the Britain in which Thatcher rose to power was an entirely different country from Britain today. The standard of living had fallen behind that of Italy and France and far behind that of West Germany. Unemployment and inflation had become chronic. Strikes cost millions of work days each year. “London,” Berlinski writes, “was dreary and sullen. Throughout Britain, people looked ragged and worn-down.” A nation that within living memory had commanded an empire and defeated Hitler had grown shabby, ugly, dirty, and poor.

Thatcher, the daughter of a greengrocer, believed she could change that, succeeding where a long line of Conservative grandees had failed. “She’s not your ordinary, world-weary, pompous, self-important, thinking-inside-the-box, slightly defeatist, pragmatic, cautious, Tory politician,” John Hoskyns, the businessman who became one of Thatcher’s closest advisers, tells Berlinski. Hoskyns showed Thatcher a diagram displaying Britain’s countless ills—a hopeless tangle of causes and effects. “What the diagram really said,” Hoskyns explains, “is that if [you were] going to change anything, [you had] to change *everything*.” Thatcher understood, realizing, as Hoskyns puts it, “that something *terrible* [had] to be done.”

The measures to which Thatcher resorted proved terrible indeed. Berlinski devotes particular attention to three.

Thatcher launched the first, an assault on inflation, immediately upon taking office in 1979. At first, Berlinski explains, Thatcher got it all wrong, permitting the government to choose mistaken monetary targets—since this was the first attempt to reduce inflation by controlling the money supply that any major industrial nation had ever undertaken, nobody knew any better. Inflation grew worse. Unemployment soared. Manufacturing dropped by a quarter. London, Birmingham, Leeds—all suf-

fered riots. Thatcher adamantly refused to back down. Inflation finally dropped dramatically—but only after some three years of economic chaos and political unrest.

Thatcher’s second terrible measure: the 1982 war in the South Atlantic. Informing the prime minister that an Argentine invasion force had embarked for the Falkland Islands, a British dependency, the Ministry of Defense offered her its considered opinion that the islands would prove impossible to recapture. “[This] pessimistic view,” Berlinski explains, “was grounded in cold reality.” Whereas the Argentine navy was the best in South America, the British navy, principally an anti-submarine force, was ill-equipped for conventional surface operations. Thatcher waved all such objections aside. “The war that ensued,” writes Berlinski, “was the largest and longest naval battle since the great Pacific campaign in the Second World War.” Britain lost six ships, 34 aircraft, and 255 lives. (Argentine deaths numbered 649.) Yet the conflict restored British sovereignty over the islands—and self-respect at home. “Great crowds gathered in London to sing ‘Rule Britannia,’” Berlinski observes—the first such celebrations since the fall of the Third Reich.

When in 1984 the National Union of Mineworkers struck, seeking to bring down the government by crippling the economy, Thatcher resorted to perhaps the most terrible measure of all: She fought back. Whereas two of her predecessors as prime minister, Edward Heath and James Callaghan, had permitted militant unions to dictate policy, Thatcher instead stockpiled coal, used the intelligence services to infiltrate the NUM, and met violence with violence, confronting the flying pickets that the union moved from mine to mine with flying squadrons modeled on the old colonial riot police. “Thatcher’s response,” Berlinski writes, “can be put in proper perspective only if we appreciate that Scargill [Arthur Scargill—“King Coal”—the leader of the NUM] was, in fact, committed to bringing about a Communist revolution in Britain.” Month after month the struggle continued. Thatcher remained immovable. After nearly an entire year, the mineworkers—“desperate,” Berlinski observes, “to feed themselves and their

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families”—voted at last to return to work. Thatcher had won. Unambiguously. Completely. Permanently. “It was,” Berlinski writes, “the end of revolutionary socialism in Britain.”

Terrible measures. And yet, Berlinski insists, they succeeded. Thatcher reversed Britain’s economic decline decisively—just five years after she took office, for example, the number of work days lost to strikes had dropped 99 percent, giving Britain what today has become “the most efficient labor force in Europe.” Thatcher likewise reversed the long decline in British prestige and credibility, proving, after her victory in the Falklands, indispensable in ending the Cold War. With Reagan, as Berlinski notes, Thatcher’s influence exceeded that of many members of his cabinet. With Gorbachev, as Charles Powell, her principal foreign-policy adviser, tells Berlinski, Thatcher served as “an anvil on which . . . he could beat out his . . . ideas.” (During their first meeting, Gorbachev attempted to argue the superiority of Communism. Thatcher cut him off: “Don’t be silly, Mr. Gorbachev. You can’t even feed your own people.”)

“There could be, at last, after all those years,” says Powell, “a genuine dialogue with a Soviet leader. . . . You said blunt things and criticized each other’s systems [and came] to understandings of each others’ point of view—which led to the clear horizon on which the Cold War could be ended.” Thatcher saw that horizon first—then made certain Reagan and Gorbachev saw it for themselves.

Why Thatcher? Why was it she who understood that something had to be done and then *did* it? Berlinski proves wonderful here, seeing past all the usual explanations—Thatcher’s intelligence, her love of argument, her capacity for work, her mastery of politics—to the true source of her achievements: her moral imagination. Thatcher was never a materialist. Mere economic efficiency was of no interest to her. She fought as she fought because she believed instead that she was participating in a struggle between civilization and barbarism, between liberty and tyranny, between—yes—good and evil. Consider a speech that she delivered in 1977, two years before becoming prime minister:

We must not focus our attention exclusively on the material, because, though important, it is not the main issue. . . . The

economic success of the Western world is a product of its moral philosophy and practice. The economic results are better because the moral philosophy is superior. It is superior because it starts with the individual, with his uniqueness, his responsibility, and his capacity to choose. . . . Choice is the essence of ethics. . . . Good and evil have meaning only insofar as man is free to choose.

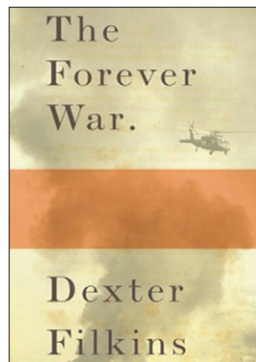
“A *moral* society, not an efficient one,” writes Berlinski, “was her goal.”

Which brings us back to Berlinski’s single failing. She devotes more than 300 pages to proving that Thatcher remade Britain, and, to a remarkable extent, the world. Then she can’t bring herself to admit it.

In some places, Berlinski attributes ridiculous claims to Thatcher’s admirers. “This business of venerating Thatcher as an infallible living god,” writes Berlinski, “is intellectually indefensible and slightly idolatrous.” It certainly is—or would be, if anyone, even among Thatcher’s stoutest adherents, ever actually engaged in such a practice. In other places, Berlinski rejects the very conclusion to which her narrative leads. “I do not propose,” Berlinski writes, “that anyone accept at face value the claim that Thatcher single-handedly reversed Britain’s trajectory.” Why not? Of those who might plausibly have served as prime minister in Thatcher’s place—Heath, Callaghan, Kinnock, and perhaps half a dozen others—how many would have done what Thatcher did? The answer, as Berlinski herself makes clear, is none. What we have here, I suspect, is an author who possesses both the honesty to tell the Thatcher story as she sees it and an intense desire to remain credible to her own, post-modern, ironic generation—to the Jon Stewart audience. Berlinski lacks, so to speak, the convictions of her courage.

“There are times,” wrote the author and scholar Geoffrey Elton, “when I incline to judge all historians by their opinion of Winston Churchill—whether they can see that . . . he still remains, quite simply, a great man.” In “*There Is No Alternative*”: *Why Margaret Thatcher Matters*, Claire Berlinski establishes that Thatcher poses the same test. Either you see her greatness or you have failed to understand the history of her times. Berlinski herself, oddly enough, doesn’t quite pass. But no matter. She has written a splendid book. **NR**

A Model War Correspondent



The Forever War,
by Dexter Filkins
(Knopf, 384 pp., \$25)

DOUGLAS J. FEITH

NEW YORK TIMES correspondent Dexter Filkins has written a gripping book, rich in vivid vignettes of courage, chaos, service, depravity, and death. *The Forever War* is not history or policy analysis. It is more in the nature of a slide show—a series of brief, often stunning, observations, mainly about combatants, victims, and reporters in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Filkins highlights the murderousness of the Taliban, of the Baathists, and of the jihadist terrorists who think of themselves as “forever” at war with the infidels. He introduces us to an Afghan boy, Faiz Ahmad, “seventeen, wearing a pair of wire-rimmed glasses, a hajj cap, and no beard,” who seemed listless but came to life when he had a chance to respond to a question about his religious education. He said his teacher taught him that “it is written in the Koran that we must kill the non-believers.” Filkins writes that Ahmad was “as close to a perfect specimen as the Taliban could imagine,”

Mr. Feith, under secretary of defense for policy from 2001 to 2005, is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and the author of *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*.

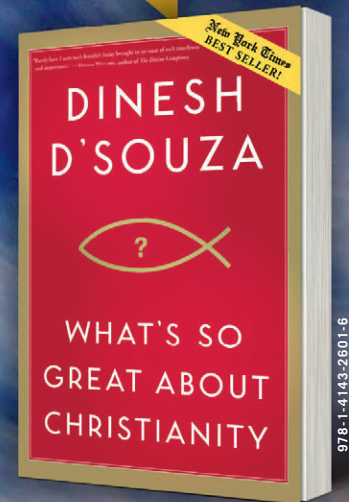
and quotes him as declaring: “There is no end to the jihad. . . . It will go on forever until doomsday.”

In Iraq, Filkins talks with Yacob Yusuf, whose brother Saadi was killed by Saddam Hussein’s regime. A government official allowed Yusuf to recover the body. The official told him he is “very lucky,” because most people never get a body back. The official waited for thanks, reports Yusuf, “so I thanked him”; but before he could receive the body, he had to pay for the bullets that had been used in the execution. “Two bullets they used to kill Saadi,” Yusuf said, crying: “Two bullets. And I paid for them. One hundred fifty dinars. And this man gave me a receipt.” Filkins comments: “Iraq was filled with people like Yacob Yusuf. They weren’t survivors as much as they were leftovers. The ruined by-products of terrible times.”

Filkins, who lived in Iraq for over three years following Saddam’s overthrow, touches time and again on the weird mix of conspiracy-mindedness and anti-Americanism found in so many Iraqis. He highlights their tendency “to see conspiracy everywhere, to reject the official version of whatever was said—to never, even, believe their own eyes.” One of the especially telling stories is of an Iraqi army colonel who had deserted and was picked up by U.S. Marines and fed peanut butter and crackers. The colonel talked at some length about his role in Saddam’s various wars: “War upon war,” he said. Though he was a professional soldier, he said he had not joined the service “to engage in fanciful adventures.” After knocking the pay and the food that soldiers received, he complained that Saddam “starts this thing with the Americans and tells us to defend the country against the invader. . . . Tell me what is the sense in that?” But then the colonel came to the conclusion that Saddam was so bad . . . that he must be “an American agent.”

Filkins has an acute sense of the absurd and the maniacal, but he is not cynical. Serious-minded compassion runs through the book. The reader comes away with a complex set of impressions of Afghan and Iraqi society—pictures not just of extremists, but also of sympathetic, hospitable, long-suffering people craving an end to barbarity and inspired by the right to vote. Filkins says Iraq had

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the marks of a traumatized country, or of “a mental hospital”—but Iraqis also showed an eagerness to reach for normalcy, to try to “build an ordinary country.”

“Every morning, I come to work with a passion to serve my country,” Aladeen Muhammad Abdul Hamza, a new policeman in the town of Diwaniya, told Filkins in the summer of 2003. But the effort to promote decency and an ordinary life, writes Filkins, required enormous courage:

They went to the slaughter. Thousands and thousands of them: editors, pamphleteers, judges, and police officers, and women like [political activist] Wijdan al-Khuzai. The insurgents were brilliant at that. They could spot a fine mind or a tender soul wherever it might be, chase it down, and kill it dead. The heart of a nation. The precision was astounding.

Filkins recounts how the insurgents warned those Iraqis who were considering participating in the elections that “we will cut off your heads and the heads of your children.” On Election Day, he visited a polling place in a school. Loud explosions boomed from outside. An Iraqi there exclaimed: “Do you hear that, do you hear the bombs? . . . We don’t care. Do you understand? We don’t care. . . . We all have to die. . . . To die for this, well, at least I will be dying for something.”

The Forever War discusses the Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan—mainly soldiers and Marines—with compassion and skepticism. Some Filkins describes with admiration. Often, his interest is in how the Iraqis saw them. He notes that U.S. forces were often short of Iraqi interpreters: “That meant that for many Iraqis, the typical 19-year-old army corporal from South Dakota was not a youthful innocent carrying America’s goodwill; he was a terrifying combination of firepower and ignorance.”

Filkins’s book shows what makes a good reporter. First of all, with impressive courage, Filkins puts himself time and again where remarkable things are happening: in Taliban-controlled

Afghanistan in the 1990s, in Manhattan in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, in Afghanistan again during the war in the fall of 2001, in Iraq on the first day of the entry of U.S. forces, and at the funeral of Saddam’s sons, Uday and Qusay. He continually finds himself in the middle of firefights and riots.

Second, Filkins writes well. His style is straightforward and unadorned, but he makes elegant distinctions—e.g., the Northern Alliance commanders in Afghanistan were “vain but rarely pompous”—and he savors the bizarre. He explains that the “craziest” thing about the suicide bombings was how the head of the bomber often survived. Recounting a bombing at a Baghdad mosque, he writes:

Sure enough, they’d found the head. They’d placed it on a platter, like John the Baptist’s, and set it on the ground next to an interior doorway. It was in good shape, considering what it had been through. Some nicks and cuts and a thin coating of dust, which gave the skin a yellow hue. The most curious aspect of the face was the man’s eyebrows: They were raised, as if in surprise. Which struck me as odd, given that he would have been the only person who knew ahead of time what was going to happen.

And third, his writing shows self-awareness, is modest in tone, and appreciates moral complexity. There is none of the all-knowing certitude of the self-righteous. At one point, Filkins wonders: “Why do the insurgents let us [journalists] stay in Baghdad? . . . I assumed they had decided that we were useful to them. That was not a comforting thought, even if it meant they would let us survive.” His book is full of telling details, but as he rises above Baghdad in a helicopter, he contemplates the validity of his pessimism and the limits of his own ground-based understanding: “Under the spell of the whirring motor I felt suddenly hopeful for the country below. . . . It was useful to fly in helicopters for this reason, I thought to myself, useful to think this way, to take a wider view of the world. Too much detail, too much death, clouded the mind.”

The period covered in *The Forever War* ends in 2006, before “the surge” in Iraq—before the Sunni tribal leaders became U.S. allies and before the rout of al-Qaeda in Anbar. So the book is generally downbeat on Iraq’s prospects: “I’d given up hope long ago that anyone in the American military knew any better than I did. Outside, Anbar seemed hopeless. Ramadi lay in ruins.” Yet Filkins

astutely touches on the early signs that the Iraqi Sunnis were souring on their jihadist allies. He quotes a Sunni insurgent who, after denouncing al-Qaeda for killing not just Americans but Iraqis, notes: “According to our Iraqi tribal traditions and beliefs, each tribe must take revenge for the death of one of its members. . . . This is a solemn obligation, even if it means you must kill a member of al-Qaeda.”

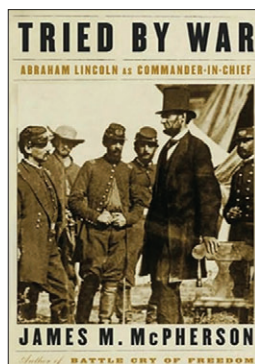
Recent reporting by Filkins marvels at how Iraq has improved over the last 18 months. In a September 2, 2008, article in the *New York Times*, he gives a wide-eyed but sophisticated account of a military parade in Ramadi, in which the Americans marched without helmets. Two years ago, he notes, Anbar Province was the “the most lethal place for the Americans in Iraq” and its capital, Ramadi, was “a moonscape of rubble and ruins.” But now, with violence down 90 percent over the past two years and al-Qaeda in Iraq “severely degraded, if not crushed altogether,” the Americans have handed to Iraqis the responsibility for security in the province.

In a September 2008 interview with *TheAtlantic.com*, Filkins describes the recent progress in Iraq as having made the country difficult for him to recognize: “The park out in front of the house where I live—on the Tigris River—was a dead, dying, spooky place. It’s now filled with people—families with children, women walking alone, even at night. That was inconceivable in 2006.” The Iraqis there judge the parks safe; they’re “voting with their feet.” “It’s a wonderful thing to see,” Filkins comments, with humane amazement untainted by U.S. domestic political spin.

Filkins is worth reading.

NR

Lincoln As War Leader . . .



Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief, by James M. McPherson (Penguin, 384 pp., \$35)

MACKUBIN THOMAS OWENS

IN conjunction with the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth on February 12, 2009, some 50 new books about him are scheduled to appear between now and 2010. An especially welcome new title is *Tried by War*, by the eminent Civil War historian James McPherson. There are surprisingly few books examining Lincoln's wartime leadership, despite the fact that he is, in McPherson's words, "the only president whose entire administration was bounded by war."

McPherson's magisterial *Battle Cry of Freedom* is the single best volume about the Civil War, and *Tried by War* is a worthy successor. McPherson seamlessly weaves the strands of military strategy, civil-military relations, the political-military strategy of emancipation, and domestic politics into a narrative whole that provides a complete assessment of Lincoln's performance as commander-in-chief.

As McPherson observes, there were no

Mr. Owens is a professor at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., and editor of the foreign-affairs journal *Orbis*. He is writing a history of U.S. civil-military relations.

real precedents to which Lincoln could turn in response to the emergency facing the government: a rebellion—in Lincoln's words—"too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings." Claiming broad emergency powers that he argued the Constitution had vested in the executive branch, Lincoln called out the militia, authorized increases in the size of the regular Army and Navy, expended funds for military purchases, deployed military forces, blockaded southern ports, suspended the writ of habeas corpus in certain areas, authorized arbitrary arrests, and empanelled military tribunals to try civilians in occupied or contested areas. He took these steps without congressional authorization, although he subsequently explained his actions to Congress once it convened in July 1861. Later he authorized conscription and issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

Historian T. Harry Williams wrote that Lincoln "was a great natural strategist, a better one than any of his generals." McPherson takes issue with this assertion, arguing that, on the contrary, Lincoln "worked hard to master the subject, just as he had done to become a lawyer. He had to learn the functions of commander-in-chief on the job."

As commander-in-chief, Lincoln articulated the war aims of the government—policy—and oversaw the development and application of national or grand strategy. In addition, he helped to shape the Union military strategy. He thus rejected what Eliot Cohen, in his book *Supreme Command*, has called the "normal" theory of civil-military relations: the notion that there is a clear line of demarcation between civilians who determine the goals of the war and the uniformed military who then conduct operations in support of war aims. Lincoln "trespassed" upon the military's turf as a matter of course. He intuitively understood that he could not simply leave the military to its own devices during war, because war involves the interplay of active wills. What appears to be the case at the outset of the war may change as the war continues, modifying the relationship between political goals and military means.

Many historians have argued that Lincoln's contributions to Union success were actually minimal, because the immense material advantages of the North assured Union victory from the outset.

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A variation of this view asserts that Lincoln's main contribution to Union victory was to wade through a mass of incompetent generals until he found the right one—Ulysses S. Grant—who finally led the Union armies to victory. McPherson rejects these contentions, arguing that Lincoln demonstrated excellent strategic acumen. He skillfully managed both his cabinet and his generals, and even Congress, where he had to maintain a working majority if the war was to be won. He did not hesitate to overrule his advisers, both military and civilian. And McPherson makes it clear that the Union's material advantage was *not* sufficient to ensure victory: Lincoln had to make the decisions that translated this advantage into military and political success.

In a strictly military sense, Lincoln understood that the key to victory for the Union was a strategy of "concentration in time," i.e., the simultaneous application of military force at multiple points, making it difficult for the Confederacy to defend its territory. Although it was not successfully implemented until 1864, Lincoln articulated the principle in early 1862, when, distressed by the immobility of his armies, he issued his General War Order No. 1, directing Union forces to move in concert on Washington's Birthday, February 22, 1862. And Grant wrote that, in April 1864, when he explained his intention to have all forces—even those on the defensive—advance at the same time, Lincoln replied: "Oh, yes! I see that. As we say out west, if a man can't skin he must hold a leg while somebody else does."

He also understood that a successful strategy required Union armies to defeat Confederate armies. Lincoln understood that it was the Confederate army, not territory or the Confederate capital, that constituted the Confederacy's "center of gravity": Crush the armies and the back of the rebellion would be broken. As he wrote to Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker in June 1863, "I think Lee's army and not Richmond, is your true objective point."

Finally, he understood the importance of the west in Union strategy. In early 1862, Union armies had employed the Tennessee River as the "main line of operations" to penetrate deep into western Tennessee and northern Mississippi, turning Confederate defenses on the Mississippi River and in Kentucky. Grant's subsequent victory at Shiloh permitted Union forces to seize major parts of the Confederacy's one remaining east-west railroad line and opened the way to both Vicksburg and Chattanooga.

The capture of Chattanooga permitted Union forces to penetrate the Appalachian barrier and seize Atlanta.

McPherson also illustrates the important challenges that Lincoln faced in the area of civil-military relations. The clearest example of this problem was Gen. George McClellan. Historians tend to treat McClellan as a first-rate organizer, equipper, and trainer but an incompetent general who was constantly outfought and outgeneraled by his Confederate counterpart, Robert E. Lee. But this is a serious misunderstanding of the situation Lincoln faced. McClellan was not incompetent; rather, he and many of his favored subordinates disagreed

with Lincoln's policies, and may have attempted to sabotage them. McClellan pursued the war he wanted to fight—one that would end in a negotiated peace—rather than the one his commander-in-chief wanted him to fight.

Until the disastrous series of Union reversals in the summer of 1862—Lee's defeat of McClellan before Richmond, his subsequent whipping of Pope at Second Manassas/Bull Run, and the Confederate invasions of Maryland and Kentucky—the consensus in the North was that the application of steady military force would convince the seceded states to return to the Union, based on the formula "the Constitution as it is, the Union as it was," i.e., with slavery where it existed but with prohibitions against its expansion into the federal territories. But the setbacks of 1862 convinced Lincoln that the initial strategy for dealing with the rebellion was inadequate. The time had come, as he wrote to Cuthbert Bullitt, to stop waging

war "with elder-stalk squirts, charged with rose water."

Lincoln now chose to defeat the Confederacy by attacking the social system of the South: the institution of slavery. After Lee's invasion of Maryland was turned back at Antietam, Lincoln issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22 that gave the Confederates 100 days to submit to the Union or face the prospect of immediate emancipation. Southern Unionists, loyal slaveholders, and Democrats charged that Lincoln was "revolutionizing" the war by issuing his proclamation. Lincoln did not disagree, admitting that once the proclamation took effect, "the character of the war will be changed. It will be one of subjugation and extermination." While generals such as Grant and Sherman, who had once believed that the Union should not attack the institution of slavery, accepted the change, McClellan never did. When this became clear to Lincoln in the fall of 1862, he relieved McClellan.

Lincoln never let sentiment or his personal opinion of an officer get in the way of his assessment of the officer's military potential. Lincoln was willing to accept a great deal from his generals if they would give him victory. The clearest example of this is the letter he sent to Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker when he appointed him to command of the Army of the Potomac in early 1863:

I have placed you at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Of course I have done this upon what appear to be sufficient reasons. And yet I think it best for you to know that there are some things in regard to which, I am not quite satisfied with you. . . . I have heard, in such a way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the Army and the Government needed a Dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you command. Only those generals who gain successes, can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship.

McPherson demonstrates that Lincoln performed effectively: He understood what had to be done, and then found the generals who could implement his vision. The Union may have possessed a material edge, but it was necessary to develop and implement a strategy that would translate this advantage into victory. This is what Lincoln did. **NR**

... And as American Thinker

Lincoln at Peoria: The Turning Point,
by Lewis E. Lehrman (Stackpole,
412 pp., \$29.95)

JAY WINIK

THE question of second acts in political leadership is one of the enduring riddles of history. Most would-be leaders simply fade into obscurity—remember Michael Dukakis—but a very few don't. Still, rarely is the path to eventual greatness easy or straightforward. For all his visions of glory, Winston Churchill was derided by his peers as a crank, an eccentric out of step with his party and ill-suited for the times; having led the American rebels to a stunning victory over the mother country, George Washington tendered his resignation and returned to Virginia, vowing never again to enter public life; and the unsophisticated Harry Truman was such an insignificant vice president that only upon FDR's death was Truman told by aides that America possessed the atom bomb.

And then, of course, there is the improbable story of Abraham Lincoln.

Improbable is the word. In 1849, his political fortunes were at their lowest ebb. He had had his run of bad luck: He was a failed one-term congressman, and Pres. Zachary Taylor wouldn't even appoint him commissioner of the General Land Office. His beloved Whig party was slowly falling apart. So, beset by disappointments and deep, debilitating moods, he returned to Illinois, mute and pensive, to practice law, unhappily watching events pass him by. But then came Congress's Kansas-Nebraska Act, authored by long-term Lincoln rival Stephen Douglas; it was this, as Lewis Lehrman vividly shows in his splendid new book, *Lincoln at Peoria*, that opened the door that led Lincoln back into public life.

Mr. Winik is the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *April 1865* and *The Great Upheaval*.

For Lincoln, Kansas-Nebraska was a profound turning point in his own life as well as in the nation's history. By repealing the 34-year-old Missouri Compromise, the patchwork measure that had effectively divided North and South, it raised the dreadful specter of the spread of slavery everywhere. It was here, on the back of slavery, that Lincoln would reenter the political arena. And it was here, by some combination of design and fate, that Lincoln was destined to make his lasting mark.

Lincoln's seminal speech in Peoria on October 16, 1854, was actually one of a series of little-known Lincoln-Douglas debates, four years before the famous Senate-campaign debates that history more often recalls. With a painter's hand, Lehrman sets the stage: A crowd gathered and Douglas spoke first, carrying on for three hours, so long that he would later lose his voice; the famished throng then broke for dinner—this was at Lincoln's shrewd suggestion—and by the time Lincoln started at seven o'clock, it was already dark, the only light coming from the flicker of candles and lanterns flanking the square.

In Lehrman's telling, the scene was perhaps a fitting metaphor for the national struggle to come. Equally fascinating, Lehrman persuasively argues that Lincoln's words at Peoria would foreshadow his oratorical masterpieces at his first and second inaugurals, as well as at Gettysburg, and lay the very foundation for his presidential decision-making.

In effect, Peoria represents Lincoln's coming of age. Gone are the sly quips and sarcasm, gone are the usual banalities in Whig thought about protective tariffs and internal improvements. And for the first time, as Lehrman demonstrates, we see Lincoln's deep philosophical commitment to the principles of 1776 and the "all men are created equal" doctrine of the Declaration of Independence, which Lincoln called "the sheet anchor of American republicanism." No less remarkable, we see Lincoln presciently warning that if Kansas-Nebraska was not repealed, America would slip into the unfathomable dangers of a civil war.

Consider just a few of Lincoln's words. "Through all this," he warned, "Bowie knives and six shooters are seen plainly



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enough; but never a glimpse of the ballot box.” And: “I do not charge . . . that such was intended by Congress; [but] if this fight should begin, is it likely to take a very peaceful, Union-saving turn? Will not the first drop of blood so shed, be the real knell of the Union?” And then his timeless invocation: “Allow ALL the governed an equal voice in the government, and that, and that only is self-government.”

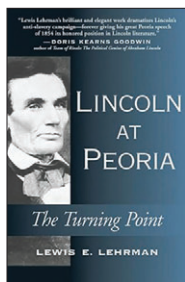
Throughout *Lincoln at Peoria*, Lehrman shows a journalist’s eye for the telling detail. Douglas spoke with “polished elegance,” while Lincoln spoke with a “thin, high-pitched” voice. Lehrman also demonstrates a scholar’s appreciation for the ambiguities surrounding Lincoln: He quotes one woman’s asking upon Lincoln’s election, “Is it *certain* Mr. Lincoln is an uncompromising anti-slavery man?” And finally, Lehrman keenly appreciates the poignancy of his story: We see Lincoln strolling in Springfield with a colleague in 1849, when the friend ruefully observes, “Lincoln the time is coming when You & I would have to be Democrats or Abolitionists.”

Lincoln at Peoria is a marvelous hybrid of a book. Beyond the narrative and an extensive analysis of the speech itself, Lehrman draws out the rest of Lincoln’s career, his political resurrection and Amer-

ica’s political realignment, the coming of the war and Lincoln’s surprise election as president, and his presidency itself, never losing sight of that magical moment at Peoria when Lincoln became Lincoln. Lehrman’s editorial hand is light, and he is careful to judge Lincoln by the standards of his own day, rather than of ours. He also goes to great lengths to quote succeeding generations of distinguished Lincoln scholars. In this sense, more than simply a fascinating exegesis, *Lincoln at Peoria* stands as a rich resource for scholars.

Lewis Lehrman’s support for American history has been unflagging. Among other things, along with Richard Gilder, he co-founded one of America’s finest historical societies, the Gilder

Lehrman Institute of American History, as well as the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University; and he has undertaken efforts to preserve original historical manuscripts. For most philanthropists, this would be more than enough, but not for Lehrman. That he would take the time to write this ambitious and endlessly absorbing book stands as fitting testimony to his long love affair with Abraham Lincoln. An enormously important contribution to the Lincoln literature, this book belongs in the library of all Lincoln aficionados. **NR**



POEM

So, you imagined I would be the kind
it would be possible you could forget,
that I would throw myself, out of my mind,
beneath the hooves of a bay thoroughbred;

or beg some local sorceress for spoken
incantations over a water root,
and send it to you with a shocking token—
my cherished shawl, scented with perfume.

But curse you. Neither one cast of an eye
nor moan I touch to your damned soul, but swear
by the passion of our nights which used to burn,
by the garden of sacred seraphim, and by
the icon of stupendous power there,
I swear to you, I never will return.

—ANNA AKHMATOVA

July 1921, Petersburg
translated by Jennifer Reeser

The Emperor of Common Sense

Samuel Johnson: The Struggle, by Jeffrey Meyers (Basic, 400 pp., \$35)

Samuel Johnson: A Biography, by Peter Martin (Harvard, 608 pp., \$35)

JOHN DERBYSHIRE

ENGLISH writer, opera producer, and all-round high-culture panjandrum Jonathan Miller once scoffed at his fellow countrymen for their refusal to take deep thinking seriously. An Englishman’s idea of an intellectual, Miller sniggered, was Samuel Johnson. (Asked to name someone he considered an intellectual, Miller offered Boileau.)

This low opinion of Johnson is widely shared amongst the cerebral portion of humanity. I was once slapped down across a dinner table by Roger Scruton when I ventured a Johnsonism. “Johnson had his opinion, no doubt,” murmured the philosopher as he turned away, his manner suggesting that I might as well have quoted Paris Hilton at him.

The scoffers have a point. Johnson was no intellectual in the modern sense (which was not current in his time, and does not appear in his great *Dictionary*). He established no theory, built no system, started no movement. The fascination of Johnson is not in his ideas about society, politics, or even literature, but in his singular character, in his deep understanding of human nature, and in the peculiar vigor and clarity with which he expressed himself.

With the tercentenary of Johnson’s birth looming (September 2009), we may expect more books about him. Here are two fine ones by seasoned and capable scholars. Much of the material in them is of course the same, but their methods of approach have a few interesting differences.

Our two authors part company most decisively on the much-argued matter of Johnson's masochism. In his later life Johnson was very close to the family of Henry Thrale, a wealthy brewer. From 1766 to 1781 he lived part-time at the Thrales' large country house south of London. After Johnson's death, Mrs. Thrale published her *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson*, with some cryptic notes hinting at a "strange connection" between herself and her house guest. After her own death in 1821, one of the items in the sale of her personal effects was "Johnson's Padlock, committed to my care in the year 1768." One of Johnson's own diary entries for 1771 records (in Latin) "mad thoughts of fetters and handcuffs." Then, in June 1773, Johnson and Mrs. Thrale exchanged two in-house letters (in French, so that the servants could not read them) hinting at a deeply, perhaps physically, submissive attitude on Johnson's part towards his hostess.

Katherine Balderston, editor of Mrs. Thrale's diaries back in the 1940s, interpreted all these ambiguities as clear evidence that Johnson was a masochist, and that Mrs. Thrale used to beat him—reluctantly, at his insistent request. Jeffrey Meyers swallows all this. Peter Martin does not.

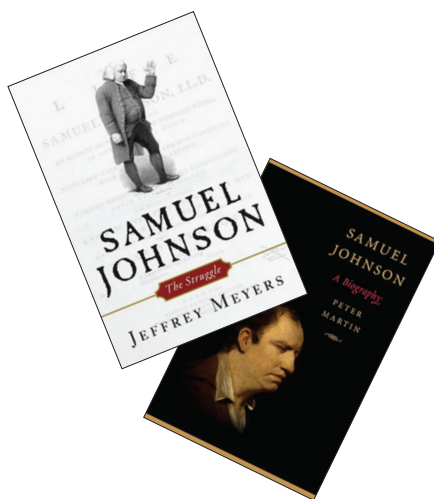
Since there is little prospect of new evidence showing up, this whole topic will likely remain a plaything for scholars, eternally unresolved. For what it's worth, I found Martin's case more persuasive, though I don't know what grounds he has for saying Balderston's theory has been "discredited." The theory is nowadays out of fashion ("flogging a dead lexicographer" is the inevitable joke around Eng. Lit. departments), but that is not the same thing.

Both authors do their best with Johnson's religious faith. That he had any at all is surprising. His intellect was skeptical and reductive to the furthest degree. "Mr. Johnson's Incredulity amounts almost to Disease. . . . He is a sad Mortal to carry a Wonder to," remarked Mrs. Thrale, who knew him better than (I think) anybody. It took Johnson's friends six months to convince him that the 1755 Lisbon earthquake had actually happened, and even then he thought the reports much exaggerated.

However, Johnson understood that skepticism on that scale needs a backstop if it is not to drag one clear through to nihilistic despair. His father had been a depressive,

and his brother (very likely) a suicide. Johnson found his backstop at age 20 in William Law's 1728 book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Law followed the method of Ecclesiastes and Juvenal's Tenth Satire, the futility of worldly desires and pleasures leading by process of elimination to trust in God (or for Juvenal, the gods) as man's only hope.

This bleak, almost Islamic, doctrine of resignation and submission, close kin of the "stoic fatalism" that historian David Hackett Fischer noted among the Anglican colonists of the Tidewater South, perfectly suited Johnson's gloomy disposition. It formed the foundation of all his moral writings, most especially the *Rambler* essays, which show Johnson at his most serious.



It also supplied the framework for his majestic long poem "The Vanity of Human Wishes," which he modeled on Juvenal's Tenth.

What we want a biographer to tell us is, how much consolation did it really provide to Johnson, who was so much in need of consolation? Not much, says Jeffrey Meyers:

Like a shipwrecked man, he clung desperately to the stability of religious belief. Any expression of heterodox opinions or religious skepticism by writers like Hobbes and Voltaire, Hume and Gibbon, enraged him, undermined his perilous balance and even threatened his sanity. . . . Religion gave him more anguish than comfort.

Elsewhere Meyers calls Johnson's *Prayers and Meditations* "one of the saddest books of the century."

Peter Martin has less to say about Johnson's inner spiritual struggles, but

more on Johnson's strong commitment to the established church as a matter of political principle. The 1773 revised edition of the *Dictionary* was, Martin shows us, larded up with quotations aimed against demands for reform of Anglican doctrine. Johnson was a Tory to his bitten-down fingernails.

Jeffrey Meyers's book includes a curious 20-page epilogue describing Johnson's influence on six later writers: Jane Austen, Nathaniel Hawthorne, A. E. Housman, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, and Vladimir Nabokov. The last two of these are the ones it is most surprising to learn were, as Boswell used to say, "impregnated with the Johnsonian aether."

Meyers explains the connections very well. So far as Beckett is concerned, one need only recall Mrs. Thrale's observation that "the vacuity of Life had at some early period . . . so struck upon the Mind of Mr. Johnson, that it became . . . his favorite hypothesis," leading him to those numerous recorded remarks about how "life must be filled up," or how idle rich people strive to "rid themselves of the day." Meyers also reminds us of the exquisitely Beckettian title Johnson gave to the last chapter of *Rasselas*: "The conclusion, in which nothing is concluded." Beckett actually started to write a play about Johnson, but abandoned the project for psychological reasons.

Nabokov coped better, though more subtly, with Johnson's huge shadow. His strange 1962 novel *Pale Fire* is, Meyers tells us, shot through with Johnsonian and Boswellian allusions. We get over seven pages on this. I should like to read *Pale Fire* again before passing judgment on Meyers's interpretation. It is Nabokov's most playful, most convoluted novel (which is saying a lot)—the kind of thing an ingenious theorist might read almost anything into.

Of these two authors, Martin has the edge on sense, I think; Meyers, on sensibility. The subtitle of Meyers's book, "The Struggle," directs our attention to a core feature of Johnson's personality: his intensely combative refusal ever to yield to anyone, or to any misfortune, or to his own inner torments. Struggle became so habitual, he could hardly bear its absence. Around age 65, disappointed at the cancellation of a fireworks display, Johnson incited a riot. What a fighter! What a spirit! What a man!

NR

■ FILM ■

Bushed

ROSS DOUTHAT

WHO would have thought that the Bush era, of all seasons, would take the edge off Oliver Stone? The post-9/11 period has made radicals out of many people far more moderate than Stone, and madmen out of many people far more levelheaded. Yet the director who made his name by disturbing more cool-headed eras with paranoid, phantasmagoric agitprop—movies that grabbed Reagan- and Clinton-era America by the lapels and bellowed, “Don’t you see what’s going on, you fools?”—has turned oddly, well, *tentative* of late. For many of his left-wing coreligionists, the last eight years have felt like a period whipped up from Stone’s usual ingredients—a dash of *JFK*, a dollop of *Nixon*, a helping of *Platoon*. But Stone himself has seemed unsure of how to handle it.

Thus in 2003, while the country was consumed by the debate over the Iraq War, Stone released *Comandante*, an admiring portrait of Fidel Castro whose politics were as appalling as you might expect, but whose contemporary relevance was next to nonexistent. The following year, while Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* was pressing the Left’s conspiracy-theory buttons, Stone was out promoting the flabby, confused epic *Alexander*, whose attempts to say something profound about West and East, conquest and occupation, came out muddled and diffuse, overshadowed by Angelina Jolie’s Transylvanian accent and Colin Farrell’s beach-bum hair. Then in 2006, as Hollywood’s paranoid stylings began to crest, Stone tackled 9/11 itself—but he did so in the most un-Stone-like way imaginable, playing it straight in *World Trade Center*, a rescue drama that was moving enough but felt like the work of a competent movie-of-the-week director, not a political provocateur.

Now comes *W.*, a biopic of our current president, starring Josh Brolin as George W. Bush. The Stone of old would have kicked the film off with a young Bush snorting coke off a stripper’s rump, and spent the next two hours piecing together a jigsaw puzzle in which Valerie Plame (surely

Sharon Stone would be available) gets outed for knowing too much about Halliburton’s war crimes, and Ahmed Chalabi (Tommy Lee Jones, perhaps, buried under prosthetics) does double-agent work for Iran while masterminding the Abu Ghraib abuses in his spare time. The post-9/11 Stone, though, doesn’t quite know what he wants to say about George W. Bush, and out of that uncertainty America’s most controversial director has produced a movie about one of America’s most polarizing presidents that feels tepid, pointless, and tame.

W. is really three films twined together. The first is a family drama, a celluloid version of Jacob Weisberg’s recent psychobiography *The Bush Tragedy*. It’s the tale of how George H. W. Bush (James Cromwell) didn’t love his wastrel son enough, and how the Iraq War was the price America paid for the 41st president’s distant, demanding parenting of the 43rd. This movie asks us to sympathize with its protagonist—all he wanted was to show his father that he was just as good as Jeb!—even as we deplore the consequences of his presidency.

But Stone’s attempts to craft a sub-Shakespearean tragedy out of the Bush dynasty’s travails are undercut by the demands of the second movie that he’s making, which is a paint-by-numbers exercise in Bush-bashing—a kind of greatest-hits compilation that seems intended to elicit knowing grins and elbow digs from *Huffington Post* readers and yawns from everybody else. No Bushism is left uncited, even if it means wrenching the president’s words wildly out of context—malapropisms that were uttered in press conferences wind up in cabinet meetings, lines from the 2000 campaign get applied to Jacques Chirac, and so forth. Bush decides to give the “axis of evil” speech; he lands on the aircraft carrier to declare “Mission Accomplished”; he tries, and fails, to answer a reporter who asks him to name the biggest mistake of his presidency. There are under-explained references to yellowcake, to “enhanced interrogations,” and to the Texas Air National Guard. In strategy sessions, Colin Powell, the noble multilateralist (Jeffrey Wright, looking pained), gets rolled by Cheney (Richard Dreyfuss) and Rummy (Scott Glenn) and Wolfie (Dennis Boutsikaris), while Karl Rove (Toby Jones) lurks in the shadows, muttering about the reelection campaign. Also, Bush chokes on a pretzel.

The only time these Cliff’sNotes become remotely entertaining is when they bleed into movie number three—the Bush administration as black comedy, *Dr. Strangelove* by way of Hunter S. Thompson. This is the movie where Bush has nightmares about boxing his father in the Oval Office; where “Yellow Rose of Texas” plays over the invasion of Iraq; where Bush’s policies get defended on Fox News by a talking head named “Jack Hawk”; where the president snarls, of Chirac, “I’d like to shove some freedom fries down that frog’s throat!” Here, Powell and Cheney snipe at each other like queen bees on *Gossip Girl*: The vice president mocks the ex-general for passing up the chance to run for president; Powell cuts Cheney dead by calling him “Mr. Five Deferments.” Here, Rove is reimagined as a malign dwarf, and Condoleezza Rice (Thandie Newton) as a hunched, handwringing sycophant with a voice like a strangled violin. Here, Cheney sells the Iraq invasion in explicitly Strangelovian terms—as a bid for oil and empire, a chance for the U.S. to take over Arabia and never, ever leave—while behind him a Situation Room map of the Middle East lights up like a sinister Christmas tree with blips representing American bases.

All of this is absurd, of course, but it’s entertaining enough to make you wish that Stone had gone all-out with the comedy—more catfighting cabinet members, please!—instead of stranding his movie between different modes of storytelling. The performers are stranded as well: Some of the actors play it straight (Elizabeth Banks gives a small, fine performance as Laura Bush), some of them (Newton and Glenn, especially) seem to be doing *Saturday Night Live* impersonations of their characters, and Brolin’s take on Bush is caught somewhere in between. When he’s given actual dramatic material to work with—in an early courtship scene with Laura, for instance—he makes something out of his character, channeling Bush’s peculiar tongue-tied charisma, his mix of insecurity and arrogance, diffidence and smarts. But when he’s handed Bushisms and asked to recreate a highlight reel, he sounds and looks like he’s cribbing from Will Ferrell. As he goes, so goes the movie: This is history as tragedy and farce all at once, with some lukewarm polemic stirred in, and the combination never gels into anything worth watching. **NR**

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MARK STEYN

Baracktopussy

By the time many of you read this, the winner of the presidential election will be known—assuming, that is, that the result is sufficiently non-close that it's beyond the margin of lawyer. So, before we close the book on this election season, let me quote one of the most dispiriting asides on the subject. Daniel Craig, the star of the new James Bond movie *The Audacity of Solace*—no, wait, *A Quantum of Hope*—was being interviewed by Kevin Sessums for *Parade* (that supplement thingy that's free in all the local newspapers), and as a final question was asked which of the two candidates would make the better 007:

Craig doesn't hesitate. "Obama would be the better Bond because—if he's true to his word—he'd be willing to quite literally look the enemy in the eye and go toe-to-toe with them. McCain, because of his long service and experience, would probably be a better M," he adds, mentioning Bond's boss, played by Dame Judi Dench. "There is, come to think of it, a kind of Judi Dench quality to McCain."

Oh, great. John McCain has survived plane crashes, just like Roger Moore in *Octopussy*. He has escaped death in ship-board infernos, just like Sean Connery in *Thunderball*. He has endured torture day after day, month after month, without end, just like Pierce Brosnan in the title sequence of *Die Another Day*. He has done everything 007 has done except get lowered into a shark tank and (one assumes) bed Britt Ekland and Jill St. John.

And yet Daniel Craig gives him the desk job.

On the other hand, Barack Obama has spent his entire adult life chit-chatting with "community organizers" and campus lefties—and he's the last action hero? It's true he's offered "to quite literally look the enemy in the eye" without preconditions. But, given that he looked

the Rev. Jeremiah Wright in the eye for 20 years and failed to notice he was an ugly neo-segregationist race-baiter peddling insane conspiracy theories, and that he looked William Ayers in the eye for almost as long and failed to notice he was an unrepentant terrorist, and that he looked Tony Rezko in the eye for an extremely beneficial real-estate deal and failed to notice he was already being mentioned in the Chicago papers for various unsavory activities, I'm not sure Senator Obama is the go-to guy for in-the-field intelligence work.



As for his plan to fly to Tehran to "go toe-to-toe" with President Ahmadinejad, one can't but feel that 007's famous exchange with Goldfinger pretty much sums up the cross-purposes:

"Do you expect me to talk?"

"No, Mr. Bond. I expect you to die."

Barack Obama expects to talk and talk and talk, while our enemies expect the West to die. I'm not sure *Chat Another Day* is a recipe for a satisfying Bond movie.

Yet Mr. Craig gets to the heart of the conservative crisis at the end of this dispiriting election season. I'm sure the Bond star disagrees with John McCain on a zillion things—although, come to think of it, he'd be hard put to disagree with him more than I do, on campaign-

finance reform, illegal immigration, government mortgage bailouts, etc. Still, political dispositions aside, it surely shouldn't be so difficult to see in the old, cranky, physically awkward survivor an heroic narrative, a sense of honor and sacrifice and personal courage—the qualities that animate great storytelling across the ages.

But no: the passive campus yakker for Bond, the naval-pilot POW for desk-jockey. That's it in a nutshell: Culture-wise, conservatives are only up for the supporting role.

That's the problem, and pulling the lever for a guy with an "R" after his name every other November isn't going to fix it. If the default mode of a society's institutions is liberal, electing GOP legislators eventually accomplishes little more than letting a Republican driver take a turn steering the liberal bus. If Hollywood's liberal, if the newspapers are liberal, if the pop stars are liberal, if the grade schools are liberal, if the very language is liberal to the point where all the nice words have been co-opted as a painless liberal sedative, a Republican legislature isn't going to be a shining city on a hill so much as one of those atolls in the Maldives being incrementally swallowed by Al Gore's rising sea levels.

As I said, I don't know the election results at the time of writing. Whatever they are, conservatism's fractious precriminations—David Frum vs. Tony Blankley, Mark Levin vs. Peggy Noonan—are set to continue. But the lesson of the last grim year is that it's not merely about candidates or policy or electoral strategy. We have to get back in the game in all the arenas we've ceded to liberalism—from kindergarten to blockbuster movies. Otherwise, as in Daniel Craig's improvised casting call, we'll be lucky to wind up with a cameo in the national narrative.

And yes, his answer was ridiculous. Whom do you want on your side when you're approaching Checkpoint Charlie and you've got to rescue the girl? The guy who flies to Germany and coos fatuous platitudes about there being "no challenge too great for a world that stands as one"? Or a crazy old coot who'll get you over the wall and take a bullet for you? I know whom Ian Fleming would have bet on.

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